



How to Use This Guide

The onboarding guide serves as a tool for anyone who's leading and supporting onboarding for a new employee at the University of South Carolina (USC). It is organized around two important questions every new employee asks during their first 90 days:

1

Learn About Your Role

Do I understand what I am here to do, how to do it and what success looks like?

2

Become Part of the Team

Do I understand where I fit, how we work together and whether I belong?

Use this guide as a starting point to create an onboarding experience that feels thoughtful, personal, and relevant to your new employee and team. You may use it to:

- Spark conversations that help a new colleague feel welcomed, informed, and supported.
- Build on the onboarding practices your area already does well.
- Identify opportunities to make the first few months clearer, more connected, and more successful.
- Add role-specific, team-specific, or local information that will help the employee thrive.
- Create a customized onboarding resource that works for your team.

The guide offers shared areas to consider across USC while leaving room for each college, division, and department to make the experience their own. Within each area, you will find a purpose statement, guiding prompt questions, and suggested points along the first 90 days to help you think about what the employee may need as they settle in.

Think of these as opportunities to pause, connect, listen, and adjust—not as required steps or sign-offs. The goal is not to complete a document. The goal is to help each new employee feel welcomed, confident in their role, connected to their team, and positioned to succeed. Colleges and divisions may customize and adapt items and specific activities to their own context and the 30,60 and 90-day indicators of progress and milestones serve only as recommendations and may vary due to the complexity of the role.



HR TIP

Use this guide to complement your current college or division's existing onboarding processes and help leaders embed them at the department level.

Learn About Your Role

Do I understand what I am here to do, how to do it, and how I will become successful?

1. Role, Purpose & Expectations

Help the employee understand their responsibilities, priorities, and what successful performance looks like.

Questions to Consider:

- What are this role's core responsibilities and priorities?
- How is success measured, and has that been communicated clearly?
- What compliance steps or training for the role need to happen, and by when?
- What recurring expectations (reports, dashboards) does this role own, and who receives them?
- How will priorities be communicated?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee can describe their core responsibilities and current priorities.	Employee performs routine responsibilities with decreasing supervision.	Employee independently articulates how their role supports a strategic priority.

2. Knowledge, Systems & Processes

Equip the employee to navigate the essential policies, systems, and processes required to do the job.

Questions to Consider:

- What essential policies, systems, and processes does this role depend on?
- What acronyms, jargon, or building navigation will be unfamiliar at first?
- What is the process for requesting time away from work and who is responsible for approval?
- What unwritten processes exist that aren't documented anywhere?
- How will the employee continue acquiring new skills after the initial ramp-up?
- Where should the employee go when a system or process breaks down?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee can access and use the core systems required for daily work.	Employee begins applying new knowledge with decreasing need for guidance.	Employee navigates systems and workflows independently.

3. Relationships & Stakeholders

Help the employee build the working network necessary to do the job and get support when needed.

Questions to Consider:

- Who does this employee need to know to do their job effectively?
- Who do they need to know for support?
- What are the supervisor's preferences for communication style, formality, and frequency (norms)?
- Who is the appropriate contact for support or decision-making as the employee becomes more independent?
- Which introductions should happen, versus letting happen naturally?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee has identified who to know for the job and for support.	Employee knows the appropriate contact for support or decisions.	Employee maintains and relies on established working relationships independently.

4. Know Where You Work

Help the employee see how their role and department fit into USC's broader priorities.

Questions to Consider:

- Which departments does this role interact with frequently, and why?
- How does this role support USC's strategic priorities?
- What basic understanding of higher education and USC's mission should every employee have?
- Has a documented 30/60/90 plan been established with the employee?
- What context does the employee need in order to understand decisions that affect their work?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee understands which departments this role interfaces with and how it connects to strategic priorities.	Employee recognizes how organizational priorities inform daily decisions.	Employee connects their individual role to strategic priorities independently.

5. Resources & Development

Help the employee find the resources they need now and take ownership of their development going forward.

Questions to Consider:

- What resources and support are available, and does the employee know where to find them?
- How does the employee locate and sign up for training and development opportunities?
- What tools, systems, or access still need to be confirmed at each phase?
- How often should progress be reviewed?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee knows where to find resources and support.	Employee knows how to access training and development opportunities.	Employee establishes an individual development plan and completes a progressed feedback conversation confirming confidence in the role.

Becoming Part of the Team

Do I understand where I fit, how we work together, and do I feel that I belong here?

1. Welcome & First Impressions

Communicate from the beginning that the employee was expected, prepared for, and is genuinely welcome.

Questions to Consider:

- Who personally welcomes the employee (when and where), and what's ready before they arrive?
- Is their workspace, equipment, and system access fully prepared?
- Who spends time with them informally during day one?
- What unwritten knowledge or processes may swerve into other lanes?
- Who checks in with them at the end of day one and through the rest of week one?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee feels welcomed and has the equipment and supplies they need.	Employee describes their first month as well-supported, without lingering setup gaps.	Employee reflects positively on their first 90 days when asked.

2. Team Structure & Ways of Working

Help the employee understand how the team is structured and how work actually gets done.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the team's structure, reporting lines, and communication practices?
- How do standard meetings work — who attends, what's discussed, what are the ground rules?
- What are the roles of other team members, and how do they relate to this one?
- What team agreement should be set explicitly in the first week — how are questions, mistakes, and differing opinions welcomed?
- Who is responsible for scheduling, agendas, and meeting logistics, and when should the employee take that on?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee understands team structure, norms, and meeting practices.	Employee participates comfortably in team meetings and routines.	Employee creates or updates meeting agendas and demonstrates adoption of team norms.

3. Culture, Values & Institutional Context

Make the team's and USC's implicit culture and values explicit, rather than something learned by trial and error.

Questions to Consider:

- How would the team describe its own culture, and how does that show up day to day?
- What institutional knowledge or context drives decisions and priorities?
- How are decisions made, and how is disagreement handled?
- What happens when someone makes a mistake?
- What unwritten rules may swerve into other lanes?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee learns the mission, values, culture, and institutional context that drive decisions.	Employee recognizes how values show up in everyday work decisions.	Employee demonstrates organizational values through behavior and decisions, not just describes them.

4. Relationships & Belonging

Help the employee move from knowing names to having genuine working relationships.

Questions to Consider:

- Who should the employee meet in Week One, and by Day 30, 60, and 90?
- Who will serve as a peer buddy or "ask anything" resource?
- Which leaders should personally welcome or meet the employee?
- Are we creating opportunities for informal interaction, not just formal introductions?
- Who will notice if the employee starts becoming disconnected?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee builds relationships with peers and leadership.	Employee develops working relationships beyond the immediate team and establishes genuine rapport with a coworker.	Employee partners actively with team members and peers.

5. Safety, Trust and Respect

Make sure the employee feels safe to ask questions, admit mistakes, and offer a different perspective, within appropriate risk levels— not just to be present.

Questions to Consider:

- How will we make it safe to say, “I don't understand,” “I made a mistake,” or “I need help”?
- Are they invited into conversations, or expected to wait until they've “earned” a voice?
- How will we actively seek their ideas and perspective, rather than waiting for them to offer it?
- How will we notice early signs of disengagement or discomfort speaking up?
- When an idea is offered, how do we make sure the employee knows it was heard?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee has been invited to share input, and early ground rules for psychological safety are established.	Employee feels comfortable receiving both positive and constructive feedback, and reports feeling safe to take reasonable risks.	Employee respectfully disagrees, proposes an alternative, or offers a different perspective — and it's recognized when they do.

6. Contribution & Community Engagement

By day 90, shift the employee from feeling like ‘a new employee’ toward becoming a contributing, connected team member.

Questions to Consider:

- Where has the employee already contributed, and has it been acknowledged?
- How will they get involved beyond their immediate assignments — committees, events, employee communities?
- Where do they still feel like an outsider, and what would help?
- How will we show appreciation when they voice a professional opinion rather than silently agreeing with the norm?
- What did we learn from this onboarding that should improve the experience for the next new hire?

Milestones:

30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Employee begins contributing to team projects and assignments.	Employee contributes to meetings and collaborative assignments and begins to feel like a contributing team member rather than a new employee.	Employee demonstrates active collaboration and can articulate how their work contributes to team, unit, and organizational goals.

Check-In Conversations

Use these questions during regular one-on-ones with a new employee. They are meant to create space for honest conversation, celebrate progress, answer questions, and identify where more support may be helpful. The person coordinating onboarding may lead these conversations, while keeping the employee's supervisor informed about progress and any support needed.

30-Day Check-In

- What is becoming clear about your role? What still feels unclear?
- Do you have the tools, access, information and training you need right now?
- Who have you connected with? Who else would be helpful to meet?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions or saying when you need help?
- What should we clarify or adjust for the next 30 days?

60-Day Check-In

- Which responsibilities can you now handle with less support?
- Where do you still need practice, context or training?
- How are team norms, meetings and communication working for you?
- What would help you most right now?
- Are you comfortable contributing ideas or a different perspective?
- What should be true by the 90-day point?

90-Day Check-In

- What core responsibilities can you now perform confidently?
- How does your work contribute to the team/unit and USC priorities?
- Where do you need continued support or clearer expectations?
- How comfortable are you asking questions, raising concerns and offering ideas?
- What feedback do you have about your onboarding experience?
- What development focus should we establish for the next phase?

Supervisor Responsibilities in Onboarding

Supervisors help new employees get oriented, build confidence, and understand what success looks like in their role. Throughout the first 90 days, check in regularly. Talk about what is going well, answer questions, remove barriers, and make sure the employee has the information, relationships, and support they need to keep learning.

By around the 90-day mark, have a clear conversation about the employee's progress, strengths, and next areas of focus. If more support is needed, work together on a plan that may include additional guidance, training, practice, or connections with others on the team.

The 30, 60, and 90-day milestones are recommendations and may vary based on the complexity of the role. For classified staff, supervisors should set formal performance expectations through the EPMS Planning Stage Process in [HR Policy 1.36](#)