



Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

APS Inclusive Onboarding Toolkit: Disability and Neurodivergence



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APS Inclusive Onboarding Toolkit – Disability and Neurodivergence

Welcome to the Australian Public Service (APS) Inclusive Onboarding Toolkit (the Toolkit). This Toolkit provides information and resources to assist agencies and employees to undertake inclusive, accessible, safe and informed onboarding practices that welcome and support new team members with disability and/or neurodivergence to the APS.

Navigating this toolkit

The Toolkit is divided into sections for easy navigation; an introduction, information for business areas, information for managers, and information for employees. The toolkit can be read in its entirety, or users can read the information most relevant to their needs.

Disclaimer

This guidance has been developed as **best practice** to support APS agencies to undertake inclusive onboarding processes. The APSC has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of this material at the time of publication.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognises their continuing connection to lands, sea, waterways, skies and songlines woven throughout.

We recognise and value the ongoing leadership contributions and work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. We celebrate the rich culture of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and pay our respect to Elders past and present, for they are the holders of knowledge and wisdom.



Acknowledgement of lived experience

This Toolkit was co-designed in collaboration with APS individuals with lived experience of disability and neurodivergence. We extend our thanks to the individuals who generously shared their time, stories, insights and feedback throughout its development. Quotes from participants appear throughout the toolkit.

We also extend our thanks to agencies for the valuable resources and knowledge provided by business areas, leaders and managers in support of this Toolkit.

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Introduction



Overview

The APS Inclusive Onboarding Toolkit (Toolkit) assists agencies to foster accessible and inclusive onboarding practises. The toolkit helps agencies to meet their obligations under the *Public Service Act 1999*, which states that agencies must foster a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian population. The Toolkit is for business areas, managers and employees.

The Toolkit contains practical information and resources that can be used to:

- create a workplace culture that is accessible, inclusive and safe
- [assist business areas](#) to provide disability and neurodivergent appropriate supports during onboarding
- [build manager](#) disability and neurodiversity confidence when onboarding employees
- [support employees](#) with disability and/or neurodivergence when navigating a new work environment to access the supports they need during the onboarding process

At a time where external recruitment activities may be reduced, the Toolkit is still relevant to support inclusive onboarding processes for a range of internal recruitment activities.

Onboarding occurs when employees move teams, within agencies, temporary transfers to another agency, secondments, machinery of government changes, and transfers at level.

Note on language: the Toolkit acknowledges individual preferences for person-first or identity-first language. This is covered in more detail in a later section. While the Toolkit generally uses person-first language, we encourage individuals to use, and be supported to use, the language conventions they prefer to describe themselves.

Why inclusive onboarding is important in the APS?

Representation of people with disability and neurodivergence is vital in the APS as it enables us to reflect the diversity of the Australian population, in turn, delivering better informed policy and services. Despite this, data from the APS Employment Database (APSED) shows the representation of people with disability in the APS has grown minimally in the past 20 years.

Representation is a foundation for true inclusion, equity and innovation. When people with disability and neurodivergence see themselves reflected across all levels of a workplace, it affirms that they are welcome and their contributions are valued.

Representation helps challenge stereotypes and foster workplace cultures where diverse ways of thinking and working are valued. It makes space for people to bring their best selves to work. Improving onboarding through this lens focuses on creating a welcoming environment where every new team member is supported to thrive.

Interconnections and interdependencies

This Toolkit meets the intent of various national priorities and strategies including:

- Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031, and associated Targeted Action Plans
- National Autism Strategy 2025–2031, and associated Action Plans

This Toolkit leverages and supports the succession of APS Disability employment strategies and workforce targets, including the recent APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020–2025.

What is disability?

In alignment with the *APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020–2025*, this Toolkit supports all employees with disability, whether they have conditions that are visible, invisible, chronic or episodic; or whether they are life-long or acquired throughout life from injury or other conditions. It encompasses a range of lived experience and focuses on reducing the specific barriers or challenges that individuals may experience at work.

The APS uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of disability. The definition informs data collection and reporting used by the Australian Public Service Employment Data (APSED). The definition states that “persons are considered to have a disability if they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities”. This can include sensory, intellectual, physical, psychosocial, mental health, head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury, or other.

This Toolkit also recognises that experiences of disability are intersectional. That is, they are influenced by other aspects of identity and demography, such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion, location, living arrangements, and marital status.¹ The intersection between disability and other identifiers may result in unique experiences of marginalisation in the workplace.

Models of disability

There are different ways of thinking about disability. The models of disability help us to understand how society views and responds to disability. This includes the medical model of disability, the human rights model of disability, and the social model of disability. This Toolkit aligns with the **social model** of disability.

The social model of disability understands disability as the interaction between people living with impairment and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, and social barriers.

¹ Department of Social Services, [Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability](#)

Disability is not inherent but is produced by a world where systems, processes and structures do not accommodate the wide variety of experiences that make up humanity.

In the workplace, the social model of disability recognises the systemic barriers that exist to disproportionately disadvantage people with disability. These reflect institutional barriers to process, policy, systems or environment, such as: organisational policies that have been designed to be “all inclusive”, but don’t adequately address the needs of people with disability; environmental barriers that prevent people with disability from accessing certain locations; or organisational barriers that limit opportunities to equitable development.

Relevant information

[Social model of disability \(People with Disability Australia\)](#)

[Good Practice Guidelines for Engaging with People with Disability \(Department of Social Services\)](#)

Language around disability

The language people use to refer to disability is personal. We acknowledge and respect the rights of people to choose how they refer to their lived experience of disability.

There are ongoing conversations about how we talk about disability. This Toolkit uses **person-first language**. Person-first language puts the focus on the individual, not their disability, and aims to recognise a person before describing their disability. Person-first language is predominantly used to refer to people with disability, unless the individual or group prefers otherwise. Examples include:

- people with disability
- participants with disability
- new team member with disability.

Relevant information

[Language Guide \(People with Disability Australia\)](#)

[People with disability \(Australian Government Style Manual\)](#)

[Language Guide \(Australian Federation of Disability Organisations\)](#)

What is neurodiversity/neurodivergence?

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term used to describe the various ways people process the world and information.²

Neurodivergence is a term used to describe a person or people who process information in a way that is different to the majority of the population.

There is no official list of identities or conditions where a person can be referred to as neurodivergent, however some examples include:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Dyspraxia

Language around neurodivergence

Language around neurodivergence is personal and continues to change. The language one neurodivergent person uses to describe themselves may differ from the language another person uses. Everyone has the right to choose the language that suits them best.

This Toolkit acknowledges that not everyone views neurodivergence as a disability, however elements of the toolkit may still be applicable to them.



TIP – ask and listen: what language to use

You can show respect and inclusion by asking a person about their language preferences. Listen to how someone shares their personal information as this will indicate how they choose to identify in relation to their disability or neurotype.

If someone tells you they are neurodivergent, you can ask something like:

“Thanks for sharing that with me. What language do you prefer around dyslexia?”

“What kind of language do you prefer I use about Autism?”

Relevant information

[National Autism Strategy 2025 - 2031 \(Department of Social Services\)](#)

[Understanding neurodiversity in the APS \(Australian Public Service Commission\)](#)

[Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice \(Australian Public Service Commission\)](#)

² Australian Disability Network, [What is neurodiversity?](#)

Information for business areas



Inclusive onboarding

Onboarding is a process of welcoming, familiarising, and integrating new employees into an organisation. Business areas have an important role to play in the onboarding process by providing appropriate documentation to managers and employees, such as:

- developing, implementing and evaluating policies, practices and procedures regarding inclusive onboarding
- facilitating supports and adjustments for employees, such as:
 - establishing staff-led networks, holding diversity and inclusion events, and offering personal and professional development opportunities; and
 - accessibility equipment, and adjustments to ensure employees with disability and/or neurodivergence have access to the tools they need to do their work.
- facilitating supports for managers, such as:
 - managerial supports and guides designed to assist managers to help their staff with disability and/or neurodivergence; and
 - managerial supports and guides for team building, and information on how to support employees with disability and/or endurance.

This Toolkit considers the start of the onboarding process from the moment a new employee accepts the job offer, through to (and including) the first 60 days of employment. For some roles, onboarding may extend past 60 days.

An effective onboarding process reinforces:

- APS Values
- Agency's Employee Value Proposition
- Ensures that the employee is set up for success.



Inclusive induction

An induction aims to provide new employees with practical tools, systems, and knowledge necessary to start their role with confidence and competence. It informs new employees about the organisation and their role within it. It might cover information about:

- what the organisation does;
- an organisational chart highlighting different branches and teams; and
- expectations of new team members in their role.

Employee inductions may include touring the workplace and facilities, meeting the team, meeting Executives, meeting Work Health and Safety officers, Fire wardens and First Aid officers, collecting workplace access cards, collecting technology and completing mandatory training. Inductions often cover elements required by law, such as the organisation's work, health and safety obligations and procedures.

It is common for new employees to complete training that covers a range of key topics like diversity and inclusion, fraud and corruption, and security awareness.



TIP – Reducing isolation risks and promoting inclusion

Remote employees can be at greater risk of isolation if not supported appropriately. Business areas should strive to create intentional inclusion strategies, such as regular check-ins that suit the individual's meeting preferences and low pressure opportunities to connect with coworkers.

Relevant information

[Remote or isolated work \(Comcare\)](#)

Inclusive conversations for business areas

Business areas can use the following tips to hold inclusive and safe conversations:

Tip 1: Base conversations on respect, inclusion, and privacy

Respect and inclusion are core values that should guide all conversations when onboarding new employees. Focus on the person, not their disability, unless directly relevant to the conversation (for example, discussing workplace adjustments). Always respect an employee's wishes regarding privacy. Be aware that some disabilities or conditions are not immediately obvious, and not all disability is visible, but respect is owed to all.

Tip 2: Use strengths-based language

Use strengths-based language to create a culture where all employees feel valued. Recognise that disability and neurodivergence are not a burden to be fixed but a valid part of human diversity. Take the perspective that people with disability and/or neurodivergence have rich knowledge, insights and strengths.

Tip 3: Discuss ways of working and adjustments early and often

Have early conversations around disability and accessibility. Consider accessibility often, not just on a new employee's first day. Other things might arise or what was originally working might not later. Talking about accessibility early and often gives employees safety to share their accessibility or accommodation needs when they feel ready.

Tip 4: Give employees permission to discuss and request adjustments

Normalise conversations around workplace adjustments and give employees explicit permission to use them and ask for them. Build a culture of an 'open door policy' by considering providing standardised information as to what workplace adjustments the agency offers.

Tip 5: Be prepared to have conversations on the supports in your agency

Provide information to new employees of the types of supports the agency offers, allowances policies, flexible work arrangements; and legal obligations. Refer employees to business areas responsible for specific matters (e.g. IT, Property, WHS); and direct new employees to information on employee networks.

Tip 6: Be prepared to have conversations on behalf of the employee

Support new employees by having conversations with other business areas where it might be necessary to escalate issues that are not being addressed. Always conduct these discussions with the consent of the employee. Advocating for the individual and their wellbeing is a powerful way to erase barriers and build trust.

Tip 7: Reflect humility and a commitment to learning

Recognise the limitations of your own knowledge and admit when you are wrong. Be willing to listen to the new employee, and reach out to other business areas for support. Apologise and correct mistakes and commit to ongoing learning.

Tip 8: Recognise needs associated with other parts of the person's identity

Be aware that a new employee may experience challenges associated with other parts of their identity in the workplace. These challenges might intersect with their disability, resulting in further marginalisation. This is commonly known as intersectionality.

Relevant information

[Hidden disabilities \(Hidden Disabilities Sunflower\)](#)

[How to talk about disability in an inclusive way \(ABC Education\)](#)

Limiting the burden of repeated information sharing

Business areas can work to reduce instances in which the onus is placed on new employees to repeatedly share their disability information and self-advocate for their needs. Best practice sees that business areas should recognise that an inclusive onboarding experience in the APS is one that proactively welcomes people with disability and/or neurodivergence, and anticipates providing a range of accessibility needs, normalising the availability of support for all.

Business areas can reduce the need for disability information sharing and self-advocacy by:

- clarifying, communicating and proactively promoting the supports and adjustments available in the agency
- working collaboratively with other business areas to provide seamless workplace support to employees
- easy to find, straight-forward and clear policies and procedures on not only obtaining access to workplace adjustments, but maintaining any supports to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose
- clearly detail where information will be stored, who has access to that information, and the legal parameters for storing that data (e.g. privacy provisions).

The APSC and PMC developed a [report and a suite of resources](#) to assist agencies when seeking disability information from employees.

Business areas should be aware that the constant requirement for new employees to share and self-advocate can cause considerable exhaustion, stigmatisation and a general sense of feeling that they are perceived as difficult:

It's exhausting and time consuming to research and request adjustments

– Toolkit co-design workshop participant

Very difficult to ask for what you need if you don't know what may be available to you or what may actually help with your workload

– Toolkit co-design workshop participant

When sharing, staff need to feel safe that it's not going to result in assumptions being made about their capacity and competence.

– Toolkit co-design workshop participant

Relevant information

[Protecting the privacy of staff with disability \(Job Access\)](#)

[Sharing access requirements \(Job Access\)](#)

[Identifying as a person with disability in the workplace \(IncludeAbility\)](#)

[Disability and the workplace \(VEOHRC\)](#)

[NDIS participants capacity to self-advocate \(AIHW\)](#)

Workplace adjustments during onboarding for business areas

Note: This section of the Onboarding Toolkit will be subject to change, following work conducted across the APS in response to the Disability Royal Commission.

Understanding workplace adjustments

Understanding workplace adjustments (sometimes known as reasonable adjustments or adjustments) is vital in ensuring successful onboarding of new team members with disability and/or neurodivergence in the APS.

When onboarding, workplace adjustments should be in place to meet the needs of new team members prior to, and during, onboarding.

Business areas should be aware that workplace adjustments are implemented on a case-by-case basis to enable people to participate fully in their employment and do the best in their role.

The APSC is leading a project for the Disability Royal Commission recommendation related to developing and implementing APS-wide principles on workplace adjustments, and an APS-wide workplace adjustment passport. Work is currently underway, and this page will be updated with further information in the coming months.

Business area resources

Practising inclusive onboarding checklist

Business areas have many opportunities to foster inclusion during onboarding, such as providing useful information about the agency and considering accessibility as part of your processes. Business areas can consider the following suggestions when designing accessible and inclusive onboarding processes.

Office and location

- Provide a map of the office, including locations of accessible doors, accessible parking, nearby parking, and common public transport routes.
- Offer the employee the opportunity to complete a Work Health Safety assessment, assist in identifying any recommended workplace adjustments.

Agency information

- Provide a welcome pack with information about the agency, its purpose and organisational structure. Where possible, provide the information in Plain Language or Easy Read and reduce the use of acronyms and jargon.
- Provide pictures of the office building, the workstation and sensory information including noise-levels, lighting and designated quiet zones if possible.
- Describe the office dress code using example pictures and text, if necessary.
- Provide a list of key contacts: HR support, IT team, Property team, WHS representative, and the Disability Contact Officer.
- Provide a list and contact details of employee-led networks, supports or social groups.

Organise training sessions

- Deliver role specific training, including explaining relevant business systems, record management systems, governance processes, PDMS, and IT systems.
- Allow additional time to complete mandatory training modules, and time for processing.
- Ensure training and inductions are accessible, e.g. videos have closed captions, images have alt text, and materials are in easy-to-read format.

Communicate and promote safety and emergency protocols

- Consult with new employees to develop Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) that address medical, physical, personal and workplace needs.
- Introduce employees to Fire Wardens, First Aid Officers, and Work Health Safety Officers.
- Outline clear channels for reporting incidents or hazards in the remote workplace.

Set up equipment, systems and adjustments

- If the new employee has pre-requested workplace adjustments (i.e. prior to the first day), ensure they are ready upon commencement.
- Set up a security pass, keys or other necessary clearance to enter and exit the office.
- Give them their laptop, headset and other necessary equipment. Support them to log into systems, update passwords, and key sites to bookmark.
- Download requested assistive technologies and confirm that it is working as intended.
- Ask employees if they require further accessible technologies to support their work, such as screen readers, ergonomic mouses etc.
- Check if they have used the systems before, and if not, offer 1:1 support or training.

Practising inclusive onboarding for remote employees checklist

A well-planned onboarding experience is essential for remote team members. Business areas can consider the following for remote employees.

Accessible work setup

- Offer Work Health Safety assessments on remote workspaces.
- Talk through access needs and workplace adjustments in a private, supported way.

Communication that works for the individual

- Offer onboarding materials in different formats and allow employees to choose what suits them (e.g. written guides, short videos with closed captioning, plain language etc.).
- Be clear and explicit in communication and outline expectations.
- Check in regularly in ways that are comfortable for the individual.

Handout: inclusive induction checklist

Induction processes are an integral component of onboarding. **Business areas taking part in onboarding** can consider the checklist when facilitating inclusive inductions.

Planning inclusive inductions

Accessible and inclusive on-site and virtual locations and meeting rooms	Yes	N/A
Accessibility information is shared ahead of time. The location is accessible with dedicated parking and/or drop-off points.		
The building has accessible entrances (e.g. automatic opening doors and ramps), accessible bathrooms near the meeting room, and accessibility features of the meeting room (e.g. hearing loops).		
The building has clearly defined and communicated emergency exit procedures.		
Meeting rooms provide multiple seating options to allow all employees to participate equally (e.g. employees who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids).		
Meeting rooms are spacious enough to enable participants to participate comfortably. Quiet spaces are available to minimise sensory overload.		
Meeting rooms are equipped with accessible technology including closed captioning and transcript options, and screen reader compatibility.		
Accessible invitations (font, links, colour contrast) and information on how to join the meeting has been shared (e.g. MS teams or an alternative dial-in method).		
A contact person is available for technology issues.		

Delivering inclusive inductions

Conduct pre-meeting checks on accessibility and prepare materials	Yes	N/A
Accessible copies of the presentation have been shared with ahead of time.		
Slide shows are in easy to read font, size and colour with high contrast. Imagery is accompanied by descriptions. Videos are accompanied by closed captions.		
Presenters know how to use accessibility tools (e.g. live captions, hearing loop).		

Deliver your induction	Yes	N/A
Presenters have delivered an Acknowledgement of Country, clearly stated their names, pronouns and country.		
Presenters have prepared an inclusive introductory statement (e.g. This induction is a safe space, where it's okay to: Step outside the room for a moment or turn your camera off, use the chat function instead of speaking, move around or use sensory tools as best works for you.)		
Presenters have advised if the meeting will be recorded and/or shared.		
Presenters face and mouth is visible (for participants who lip read or sign language interpreters). Presenters check they can be seen and heard.		
Presenters provide participants an opportunity to introduce themselves.		
Presenters provide options that suit employees (e.g. camera on/off, voice muted, use of text chat).		
Presenters advise employees of multiple ways to ask questions (e.g. raising their hand, sending chat messages, or speaking to the presenter afterwards).		
Presenters monitor employees who raise their virtual hand and invite them to speak, monitor employees with low engagement and invite participation.		
Presenters monitor the chat and read aloud messages or questions.		

Relevant information

[Hosting accessible and inclusive online meetings and events \(AHRC\)](#)

[Inclusive Meetings \(Diversity Council Australia\)](#)

[A Guide to Running Inclusive Meetings \(Inclusion Australia\)](#)

Information for managers



Inclusive onboarding

How a team member is onboarded can have a big impact on their engagement. Accessible and inclusive onboarding ensures that new team members feel safe, supported and satisfied.

Why accessibility and inclusion matter during onboarding

Accessible and inclusive onboarding sets the tone for an enduring employment relationship based on open communication, mutual respect and trust. This ensures new team members can engage and participate on an equal basis. People do their best work when they feel seen, heard, valued, and included.

Setting the tone for inclusion

It is helpful to begin conversations early. Before new team members commence, provide introductory information about the agency and team, outline the agency's values, provide information on available employee networks and their contact details, provide points of contact, and ask new team members about their working needs.

There is a lot of information for a new team member to process. Often, there is a heavy burden to look for relevant information or advocate for one's own needs. By providing clear and accessible information, new team members can feel more confident and informed.

*Embedding inclusive practices in team routines and leadership behaviours “**makes me feel safer to share my needs. Especially when you are still learning about your own disability**” – Participant of co-design workshops*

*Accessibility and inclusion matters “**so that employees can bring all their skills and abilities to the workplace and be able to deliver to the best of their abilities without feeling like a burden or afterthought**”*

– Participant of co-design workshops



TIP – Begin conversations early (including prior to commencement)

Asking a new team member if they require any adjustments or supports at work gives them an opportunity to share information, such as need for accessible parking, accessible desk arrangements, assistive technology or sensory adjustments.

It is important to have this conversation without pressuring them to provide an answer, or to do so quickly. Allow people the time to think about what they may need, and to come back later. By inviting a new team member to think about whether or how to communicate their needs, you not only give your workplace time to set up workplace adjustments, but you give a new team member agency to voice how they work best.

Inclusive conversations for managers

Language on disability disclosure

Language to reflect self-identification in the workplace is constantly changing. Managers should be aware that the word “disclosure” may:

- incite feelings of discomfort or anxiety;
- invoke pressure to reveal personal information that a person may not wish to;
- give the perception that the team member is revealing something that is embarrassing, taboo or different; or
- reveal a part of themselves that could otherwise be held against them in the workplace.

Language associated with ‘sharing’ is considered best-practice in regards to disability. This language gives a team member control to share as much or as little as they’d like about themselves.

“Sharing welcomes people to bring other aspects of themselves to work”

– Toolkit co-design workshop participant

Remember

- Sharing information about a person’s own disability, neurodivergence, or workplace needs can be uncomfortable.
- Some people may not wish to share their disability due to fear it might affect their employment or career development.
- Some people may not consider their disability is relevant to their ability to work.
- Some people may never choose to share their disability.



Sharing personal and sensitive information

Welcoming team members to share their disability and/or neurodivergence is an important way to ensure they feel included and able to bring their best self to work. Managers can create safe spaces that all people can share their journey when they are comfortable.

There is **no** legal obligation for an employee to share information about their disability and/or neurodivergence at work. Sharing disability information does not mean pressuring people or asking invasive questions about their disability, personal lives and/or medical history.

Relevant information

[Increasing disability identification in the Australian Public Service](#)

“Disclosure is up to each individual.” People have a right to “disclose to particular people at particular times for particular purposes... and with an expectation of confidentiality” – Toolkit co-design workshop participant

Managers can model openness, engagement, and empathetic leadership; and should develop safe environments where vulnerable conversations can be had. Safe spaces reinforce an employee’s autonomy, choice and control over when, where, who, and how they wish to share information about their disability, neurodivergence, and/or working needs.

Responding to shared disability information

Sharing details of disability and/or neurodivergence is a deeply personal decision. This decision can be either a positive or a negative experience for an employee. How managers respond in these moments matters, and a manager’s response to an employee sharing their sensitive information can either build trust or unintentionally shut down further conversation. The following principles can guide in the response:

1. Expect and make space for emotion

Sharing disability or neurodivergence at work can be accompanied by strong emotions, like relief, anxiety, vulnerability or anger. Let the new team member know they are heard and thank them for entrusting you with this information.

2. Resist the urge to relate by talking about yourself

It’s natural to want to make someone feel less alone by sharing a similar experience. However, the focus should be entirely on the person sharing. Sharing your own stories or trying to find common ground, while well-meaning, can unintentionally redirect attention, invalidate someone’s experience, or close off the conversation. Instead, focus on listening without interruption, ask open-ended questions, and clarify what support looks like for them.

3. Be aware of triggers and respect boundaries

Some aspects of disability and/or neurodivergence may relate to past trauma, including experiences of exclusion, bullying or discrimination. Managers should be mindful of this as they ask questions about the new team member’s needs, framing their curiosity through a lens of respect, and avoiding unnecessary conversations relating to diagnoses, medical information, evidence, or assumptions about capability.

4. Have tools and resources ready

It's okay not to have all the answers in the moment, what's important is you know where to go next. Managers should be familiar with internal processes for workplace adjustments, HR supports, Employee Assistance Programs, and Disability Contact Officers.

5. Limit the likelihood of bias (including unconscious bias)

Bias can significantly affect how we engage with people with disability. Being aware of our biases whether conscious or unconscious, can help ensure that sharing of disability is not met with disbelief, annoyance, or scepticism.

Limiting the burden of repeated sharing and self-advocacy

Managers are encouraged to work to reduce instances in which the onus is placed on new team members to repeatedly share their disability and self-advocate for their needs.

Managers should recognise that inclusive onboarding experiences are ones that proactively welcome all people, and anticipates a range of access needs for people with disability and/or neurodivergence. The emphasis of normalising workplace supports for all employees helps reduce stigmatisation, self-consciousness, and/or fear.

Managers can reduce the burden on employees to share disability information and limit the ongoing need for self-advocacy by:

- Inviting conversations with all new team members on their workplace needs, regardless of whether disability or neurodivergence is shared or not;
- Appreciating that some staff may not have a clear understanding of their own disability and/or neurodivergence, particularly in instances of an acquired disability, degenerative disability, or late diagnosis;
- “Going on the journey” with team members who are new to learning about their own disability and/or neurodivergence; and
- Being open, communicative, respectful, and providing a safe space for team members to share information about themselves.

Managers should be aware that the constant requirement for new team members to share and self-advocate can cause considerable exhaustion, stigmatisation and a general sense of feeling that they are perceived as difficult.

“It’s exhausting and time consuming to research and request adjustments”

– Toolkit co-design workshop participant

“Very difficult to ask for what you need if you don’t know what may be available to you or what may actually help with your workload” – Toolkit co-design workshop participant

“When sharing, staff need to feel safe that it’s not going to result in assumptions being made about their capacity and competence” – Toolkit co-design workshop participant

Relevant information

[Protecting the privacy of staff with disability \(Job Access\)](#)

[Sharing access requirements \(Job Access\)](#)

[Identifying as a person with disability in the workplace \(IncludeAbility\)](#)

[Disability and the workplace \(VEOHRC\)](#)

[NDIS participants capacity to self-advocate \(AIHW\)](#)

Talking about disability and neurodivergence

Do

- Use accurate, inclusive language.
- Ask someone whether or how you can support them in your capacity as a manager.
- Be fully informed of your agency's policies and take the time to educate a team member about workplace entitlements.
- Normalise conversations about workplace adjustments and preferred ways of working.
- Ask a team member whether they feel comfortable sharing their disability status or neurodivergence with others, and if so, how would they like to have this conversation.
- Eliminate and combat bias by believing employees who need workplace adjustments.
- Know where to refer a team member if they are seeking dedicated support (e.g. EAP).

Don't

- Assume that a person fits neatly into a stereotype of disability or neurodiversity.
- Use terms that disregard a person's preferred ways of describing themselves.
- Get defensive or dismissive when someone corrects the language you are using.
- Ask invasive questions about an individual's disability or medical history.
- Make promises you cannot keep or mislead people about their workplace entitlements.
- Single a team member out for requiring workplace adjustments.
- Out a team member for their disability or neurodivergence.
- Make moral assessments about whether someone is telling the truth.
- Assume that you need to be the expert in disability.

Conversations with team members about ways of working

Managers can have conversations with team members to set them up for success in understanding one-another's ways of working.

Everyone has a different learning, communication and working style. Knowing and respecting these differences can make a work environment more inclusive and productive. Conversations about ways of working can benefit everyone, but they can be particularly important for people with disability or neurodivergence, signalling that they are supported to work in a way that leverages their strengths and abilities.

These conversations can be had at any time, however it can be helpful to give new team members time to settle into their role, understand team dynamics, and navigate a new working environment. While some topics might come up naturally, managers can schedule time later on to have conversations around preferred ways of working. Managers can use these prompts to learn more about a new team member.

TIP – Use the **Ways of working template** to record a person's preferred ways of working. Remember that preferences are not static and can change over time.



Workplace adjustments during onboarding for managers

Note: This section of the Onboarding Toolkit will be subject to change, following work conducted across the APS in response to the Disability Royal Commission.

Understanding workplace adjustments

Understanding workplace adjustments (sometimes known as reasonable adjustments and/or adjustments) is vital to ensure successful onboarding of new team members with disability and/or neurodivergence in the APS.

In the case of onboarding, workplace adjustments should be in place for team members prior to, and during, onboarding. Managers should be aware that workplace adjustments are implemented on a case-by-case basis to enable people to participate fully in their employment and do the best in their role.

The APSC is leading a project for the Disability Royal Commission recommendation related to developing and implementing APS-wide principles on workplace adjustments, and an APS-wide workplace adjustment passport. Work is currently underway, and this page will be updated with further information in the coming months.

Manager responsibilities during onboarding

Managers play an essential role in creating an inclusive and safe workplace environment during onboarding. Managers can collaborate with the team member and business areas to implement solutions to reduce or eliminate any identified barriers. Managers should regularly

check in with their team members to ensure that they feel supported, and managers should follow through on agreed actions and provide regular updates to their team member.

An employee can request a workplace adjustment at any time during the employment life cycle. Providing adjustments in a timely manner is critical and a legal requirement under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

Conversations on workplace adjustments during onboarding for managers

New team members may be timid when asking for adjustments, without realising that requesting workplace adjustments is within their employment rights to do so. A new team member might not know what kind/s of adjustment they need until they begin working. Framing conversations around what the agency can do to support a person who requires workplace adjustments can help build trust, psychological safety, and belonging in the team.



Managers can use these tips when having conversations about workplace adjustments:

- Be authentic, listen to the team member's needs and help find solutions;
- Host conversations on workplace adjustments with all team members, whether they have disability or not;
- Seek to understand what workplace adjustments a team member needs without requiring an explanation as to why it is needed;
- Be aware that people not required to provide details of their disability, how it affects them, or evidence of the requirement for adjustment (in most circumstances).
- Inform team members that their privacy is respected and upheld when discussing their disability or adjustments, in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles; and only with explicit consent will this information be shared with relevant parties.
- Where possible, eliminate situations where the new team members may have to share their information or adjustment needs multiple-times over.

Manager resources

Inclusive onboarding in practice

Managers have many opportunities to foster inclusion during onboarding which gives new team members confidence that your agency takes inclusion seriously. Managers can consider the following when conducting accessible and inclusive onboarding process.

Share information about the office and location

- Give a tour of the office. Show toilets (including disability and unisex), emergency exits, prayer rooms, breastfeeding rooms, quiet spaces/low sensory areas, first aid room, printers, kitchens, and lockers.
- Show the new team member their desk and seating arrangements.

Share information about the agency

- Explain key workforce policies and where to find them (e.g. agency's Intranet page), including sick leave, personal leave, flexible work arrangements.
- Provide a list of key contacts to the direct line manager, and any other relevant people.
- Assign a work buddy who can provide support during onboarding if possible.

Communicate and promote safety and emergency protocols

- Discuss work health safety to ensure understanding of expectations and procedures.

Set up equipment, systems and adjustments

- Ask if the team member has a workplace adjustment passport from another agency they wish to use.
- Check if the team member is comfortable sharing their workplace adjustments with the team, and how they would like for the team to be informed.

Communicate supports provided by manager and team

- Ask the new team member their preferred way to communicate and receive direction.
- Ask if they would like 1:1 meetings, the frequency and structure of meetings, and how they would like to participate. Offer flexibility with meetings times and work hours, recognising some people may need extra breaks between meetings.
- Check how the team member wishes to be introduced. E.g. by shortened names, nicknames, alias, or titles.
- Introduce the new team member to the broader team and other contacts they might be working with in their role. These might be virtual/hybrid meetings if team members are working remotely.
- Check team member comfort levels when meeting staff members in other teams before making introductions. Avoid back-to-back introductions or large group meetings.

- Ask if the new team member would like a team lunch or morning/afternoon tea to welcome them. These might be virtual/hybrid meetings if the team works remotely.
- Offer flexibility for team members to work remotely in situations where their disability or health may be compromised by being in the workplace, such as large-group training.
- Allow time for new team members to ease into the role, building confidence and skill gradually rather than expecting full immediate engagement.

Onboarding remote team members inclusively

A well-planned onboarding experience is essential for remote team members. Managers can consider the following:

Build a sense of belonging and trust

- Foster rapport with new team members by using effective communication tools and create a safe space for interactions through video calls and instant messaging.
- Allow them to choose how and when they meet team members, using options like written introductions, one-on-one chats, or staggered meetings.
- Assign a primary contact or buddy who can virtually guide the team member through onboarding.
- Recognise camera preferences, noting some may wish to have cameras off, while others may benefit from having cameras on to speech-read or see body language.
- Trust team members to manage their time and energy in ways that work for them, and be ready to help team members who need more structured guidance and support.

Accessible work setup

- Remember work, health and safety obligations extend to remote team members.
- Talk through access needs and workplace adjustments in a private, supported way.

Communication that works for the individual

- Be clear and explicit in communication and outline expectations.
- Check in regularly in ways that are comfortable for the team member.



TIP – Reducing isolation risks and promoting inclusion

Remote team members can be at greater risk of isolation if not supported appropriately. Managers can create intentional inclusion strategies, such as regular check-ins that suit the team member's meeting preferences and provide low pressure opportunities to connect with the broader team and agency.

Relevant information

[Remote or isolated work \(Comcare\)](#)

Inclusive workplace conversations on disability

Managers can use the following conversation tips:

Tip 1: Base conversations on respect, inclusion, and privacy

Respect and inclusion are core values that should guide **all** conversations. Focus on the person, and not their disability, unless directly relevant to the conversation. Always respect the person's wishes regarding privacy. Recognise that some disabilities or conditions are not immediately obvious. Remember that not all disability is visible, but respect is owed to all.

Tip 2: Use strengths-based language

Use strengths-based language to create a culture where all people feel valued. Recognise that disability and neurodivergence are not a burden to be fixed but a valid part of human diversity. Take the perspective that people with disability and/or neurodivergence have rich knowledge, insights and strengths.

Tip 3: Discuss ways of working and adjustments early and often

Have early conversations around disability and accessibility. Consider accessibility often, not just on a team members first day. Other things might arise or what was originally working might not later. Talking about accessibility early and often gives your team safety to share their accessibility or accommodation needs when they feel ready.

Tip 4: Give team members permission to discuss and request adjustments

Normalise conversations around workplace adjustments and give your team members explicit permission to use them and ask for them. When discussing adjustments, provide the same information to all team members. Opening conversations around what you use to support your work can signal that conversations are welcome.

Tip 5: Be prepared to have conversations on the supports in your agency

Position yourself to have meaningful conversations by being informed of agency supports. Have a good understanding of available allowances, policies or flexible work arrangements; understand legal obligations; know which teams are responsible for certain matters (e.g. IT, Property, WHS); and direct new team members to information on employee networks.

Tip 6: Be prepared to have conversations on behalf of the employee

Support new team members by having conversations with others where it might be necessary to escalate issues that are not being addressed. Always conduct these discussions with the consent of the team member. Advocating for the individual and their wellbeing is a powerful way to erase barriers and build trust.

Tip 7: Reflect humility and a commitment to learning

Recognise the limitations of your own knowledge and admit when you are wrong. Be willing to listen to the new team member, and reach out to HR teams or Disability Contact Officers for support. Apologise and correct mistakes and commit to ongoing learning.

Tip 8: Recognise needs associated with other parts of the persons identity

Be aware that a new team member may experience challenges associated with other parts of their identity in the workplace. These challenges might intersect with their disability, resulting in further marginalisation. This is commonly known as intersectionality.

Relevant information

[Hidden disabilities \(Hidden Disabilities Sunflower\)](#)

[How to talk about disability in an inclusive way \(ABC Education\)](#)

Conversation prompts for managers

Conditions you like to work in

- Do you prefer quiet spaces, collaborative spaces, or a mix of both?
- Do you like working on tasks independently or in collaboration with others?

How you like to be tasked, how do you like to learn?

- What's your learning style?
- Do you need instructions in written format?
- Do you need ongoing discussions about your work?
- How do you like to receive feedback? Written? In person?

How you like to communicate

- What are your communication preferences?
- Do you prefer cameras on or off for virtual meetings?
- Do you prefer communicating via email and chat functions or verbally?
- How often would you like to schedule one-on-one catch-ups?

The hours you work best

- When are you most productive?
- Do you need flexible work arrangements?
- Are there times in the day that should not have scheduled meetings?

What you love about work

- What types of work / tasks do you enjoy? What gives you joy at work?
- What are you hoping to gain from this role?
- What workplace values resonate with you? Teamwork? Collaboration? Structure?
- What kind of things bother you in the workplace?

Other things you want you want to share

- What would you like your team members to know about you?

Information for employees



What is onboarding?

Onboarding is a process of welcoming, familiarising, and integrating new employees into the organisation. For the employee, this process can include:

- getting to know the manager, team and role.
- learning organisational policies and practices.
- establishing social relationships and building a sense of belonging in the workplace.
- building an understanding of the organisation's culture.

“Onboarding sets you up for how you view the organisation, how you work within the organisation and how safe you feel. It is important to be seen and heard and feel that you matter” – Participant of co-design workshops

What is induction?

Induction aims to provide new team members with practical tools, systems and knowledge necessary to start their role with confidence and competence. It informs new team members about the organisation and their role within it. It might cover information about:

- what the organisation does
- an organisational chart highlighting different branches and teams
- what the team's role and function is, and may introduce the names and contact details of team members
- expectations of new team members in their role.

Inductions might include touring the work environment and facilities, meeting the team, collecting workplace access cards or keys, collecting technology and completing mandatory training.

Inductions often cover elements required by law, such as the organisation's work, health and safety obligations and procedures. It is also common for new team members to complete training modules that cover a range of key topics like diversity and inclusion, fraud and corruption, security awareness, amongst others.

Onboarding will often be concurrent with a probation period, and managers will provide a new team member with information to help them understand their obligations and how to fulfil the agency's expectations during the probation period.

Workplace adjustments

All team members have the opportunity and right to request workplace adjustments. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1979, it is unlawful for an employer to refuse to provide workplace adjustments to a person with disability. Under workplace relations legislation, it is also unlawful to discriminate against certain protected attributes (one of which is disability).

An employee can speak to their manager and/or the HR team to request adjustments, or ask the agency what supports and adjustments they provide. Adjustments are put in place to assist employees to be able to carry out their role and complete their work.

Once an agreement is in place, the team member may choose to complete a Workplace Adjustment Passport and ensure the information is correct and up to date.

The APSC is leading a project for the Disability Royal Commission recommendation related to developing and implementing APS-wide principles on workplace adjustments, and an APS-wide workplace adjustment passport. Work is currently underway, and this page will be updated with further information in the coming months.

Relevant information

[Disability discrimination \(Australian Human Rights Commission\)](#)

[Know your rights about disability discrimination and harassment \(Australian Human Rights Commission\)](#)

Employee resources

Communication and sharing information on team member's preferred ways of working can help set the team up for success.

Everyone has different learning, communication and working styles. Knowing and respecting these differences can make a work environment more inclusive and productive. Having conversations about ways of working can benefit everyone, but they can be particularly important for people with disability and/or neurodivergence. Managers can signal that they support their team members' ways of working by being adaptive communicative, and empathetic.

Conversations can occur at any time, but it's a good idea for managers to give a new team member time to settle into their role, understand team dynamics, and navigate a new working environment. New team members can use the below questionnaire to help the manager understand their working style and support/s required.

Ways of working questionnaire

Ways of working template for: (print name)

Seen by (manager or supervisor): (print name)

Date:

Conditions I like to work in (e.g. quiet spaces, with headphones, in collaboration with others)

How I receive tasks and learn (e.g. reading, visual, discussions and how I prefer to receive feedback)

How I like to communicate (e.g. in person chat, calls with video on or off, emails)

The hours I like to work (e.g. when are you most productive, flexible ways of working)

Things I love about work (e.g. types of work I enjoy, values, things that give me joy at work)

Other things to know about me (e.g. other likes or dislikes, personality quirks, other things I would like my team members to know about me)

Case study: Preparing for day 1



Manager perspective: Jo

Jo manages a small team and is aware that new team member, Steve, will be joining in four weeks. Steve has shared details about a medical condition they have and indicated they may require workplace adjustments to perform their role effectively. Jo feels a bit uncertain about having these types of personal conversations, so they contact HR for guidance and refer to the Inclusive Onboarding Toolkit for practical tips.

Jo arranges an introductory meeting with Steve to discuss the role, team, and the nature of the work. In the email invitation, Jo checks Steve's preference for meeting in person or online and includes a brief agenda to structure the conversation. The conversation provides an opportunity for Jo to get to know Steve, explore their working and communication preferences, and discuss any required adjustments.

Jo is mindful of maintaining Steve's privacy and confirms that any information shared about their needs will be treated confidentially. Jo listens carefully and takes notes. Steve is unsure of all the adjustments they require, so Jo provides reassurance they can have ongoing conversations.

Following the meeting, Jo collaborates with the relevant business areas to prepare Steve's workplace adjustments ahead of their first day. Jo also emails Steve a summary of their conversation, confirms the agreed adjustments, and warmly welcomes them to the team. Jo's future focus is on understanding how to best support Steve to thrive at work.



New team member perspective: Steve

Steve is excited to start work at a new agency. They have signed their employment contract, received an onboarding package from HR, and received an email from their new manager, Jo, offering to meet in person or online before they officially commence work. This early gesture sets a positive tone for the onboarding process.

Steve agrees to meet in person at the café in the office lobby. They appreciate receiving an agenda as it allows them to prepare for the meeting. In previous roles, Steve has shared details of their medical condition with the agency, only to find the information wasn't passed on or acted upon. Now, Steve values Jo's interest in reaching out for a conversation.

During the meeting, Steve is grateful to hear more about the role, the team, and the work. They feel Jo takes the time to understand their working and communication preferences and adjustment needs. The conversation is respectful and focused on enabling Steve to thrive, not on personal details or limitations. Steve feels comfortable sharing.

After the meeting, Steve receives a follow-up email confirming the agreed adjustments, welcoming them to the team, and a link to the Onboarding Toolkit. By the time they start, adjustments are in place and conversations about workplace support feels inclusive and ongoing. Steve feels confident to speak up if future needs arise.

Starting a new job with a disability can be daunting, but Steve's experience shows how inclusive leadership, clear communication and early planning can create a welcoming onboarding experience.

Glossary of key terms

This glossary reflects the key terms used in this document to reflect an inclusive onboarding process in the APS.

Term	Definition
Accessible Formats	Alternative ways of presenting information (e.g., alt text, large print, Braille, audio, easy to read) to ensure everyone can access the content.
Accessibility	Addressing and removing issues with workplace design and systemic barriers that prevent some people from performing their job confidently and competently and developing their career. Making arrangements to job and workplace design to maximise job satisfaction, engagement and productivity.
Assistive technology	Equipment, systems, devices or technology that help people to perform tasks in the workplace. Examples include screen readers, speech to text software, braille, keyboards and magnifiers.
Barriers	Physical, procedural, attitudinal, cultural, or systemic obstacles that prevent employees from accessing, participating in, or contributing to the workplace on equal terms.
Belonging	When people feel accepted, recognised, and everybody's views and contributions are integrated, valued and respected. People feel confident and inspired to bring their whole selves to work because differences are embraced as strengths.
Bias	A disproportionate weight in favour of or against something or someone. While we can process bias consciously or unconsciously, it can have unintended consequences or unfairly influence our decisions and our thinking.
Captioning Services	Real-time or recorded text display of spoken words during meetings, presentations, or videos to support accessibility.
Disability	Disability is diverse and everyone has unique experiences. There are different ways of thinking about disability. The models of disability are frameworks to understand how society views and responds to disability.
Diversity	The differences found in people that create their unique identity, including age, caring responsibilities, cultural background, religion, disability, cognitive diversity, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background. It also encompasses profession, education, political views, values, work experiences, and organisational role.
Equality	The principle of treating all individuals the same, regardless of their personal circumstances, background, or needs.
Equity	Treating people fairly but differently. Equity promotes fairness by identifying differences and allocating resources based on need.

Term	Definition
Flexible work arrangements	Work options that allow employees to vary their hours, location or work patterns to accommodate individual needs (e.g., remote work, flexible start/finish times, job-sharing, part-time hours).
Hidden, invisible or Non-Apparent Disability	A disability that is not immediately apparent, such as chronic illness, mental health conditions, or neurodivergence.
Identity	The way we define ourselves and include our values, beliefs, and personality. It can include those dimensions listed under 'Diversity' and encompasses the roles we play in our society and family, our past memories, our hopes for the future, as well as our hobbies and interest.
Inclusion	When people can access opportunities and are regularly asked to contribute perspectives and ideas. For instance, inclusion occurs when people of different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and abilities, are included on committees, consulted, and invited to comment.
Inclusive language	Using accurate and respectful language to creates a culture where all people can feel respected, valued and included.
Induction	The induction process informs new team members about the organisation and their role within it. It might cover information about what the organisation does and expectations of new team members. An induction aims to provide a person with practical tools and knowledge necessary to start their role with confidence and competence.
Intersectionality	The ways in which people's lives are shaped by the intersection between multiple social identities, such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion, location, living arrangements, and marital status; and the ways in which these intersections can result in unique experiences of discrimination or marginalisation.
Lived experience	People with unique knowledge, abilities and attributes. They draw on their own life-changing experience, service use and their journey of recovery and healing, to support others.
Neurodiversity	The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.
Onboarding	A process of welcome and familiarising new team members with the organisation, including getting to know their manager, team and role; learning organisational policies and practices; and establishing social relationships and a sense of belonging in the workplace.
Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)	An individualised and documented plan that outlines how a person with disability or other adjustment need will evacuate a building in an emergency.

Term	Definition
Pre-employment	The period after a new team member signs their employment contract but before they arrive on Day 1. Depending on the role and commencement date, this period can last several weeks to several months.
Psychological safety	A shared belief the environment is safe to take risks and be vulnerable. People feel valued, able to express ideas and ask questions, and do not feel they will be punished for speaking up.
Social model	Disability as the interaction between people living with impairment and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. From this perspective, disability is not inherent or individualised, but is produced by a world where systems, processes and structures do not accommodate the wide variety of skills, needs and capabilities that make up humanity.
Systemic barriers	Institutional processes, policy, systems, and environment that disproportionately impact underrepresented cohorts and can harm people from entering the workforce, feeling safe at work, progressing their career, being their authentic selves at work.
Unconscious bias	Unintentional stereotypes and beliefs and about different social and identity groups that are automatic and/or ingrained and can influence behaviour and perceptions and actions.
Workplace adjustments	A change to the work environment, practices, or equipment that enables a person with disability, injury, health condition or other needs (such as caring responsibilities etc.) to perform the requirements of their job and participate equally in employment.