Manager’s Guide to support the onboarding of Indigenous students

Prepared by the Indigenous Centre of Expertise for the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity

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# Context

The [Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/Indigenous_Student_Employment_Opportunity_-_EVENTS?setlang=fr&uselang=fr) (ISEO) is an employee experience program that aims to improve the inclusion of Indigenous students in the public service. By enrolling in the program, participants benefit from tools and supports such as networking activities, culturally sensitive resources, and mentorship.

The program was initially launched in 2016 as the *Indigenous Youth Summer Employment Opportunity* and was proposed by the Assembly of First Nations with the goal of expanding efforts to recruit and retain Indigenous young people into the federal public service.

This guide is designed to provide hiring managers with culturally sensitive onboarding resources for Indigenous students hired in the public service and serves as a compliment to your departmental onboarding guide.

This guide is informed by feedback received from Indigenous public servants, current and former Indigenous students, human resources practitioners and hiring managers, as well as the results of the [Student Experience Survey](https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/ses-sfee/2023/results-resultats/en/bq-pq/dem/00/27#s2).

It also aligns with recommendations from the [Many Voices One Mind](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/knowledge-circle/many-voices.html) strategy and the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s - Call to Action # 7](https://nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports).

# The unique experiences of Indigenous students in the workplace

## Indigeneity

Not all Indigenous students are necessarily close to their cultures. The degree of connection to one's Indigenous culture can vary widely among individuals based on a variety of factors, including:

* Some Indigenous students may have lived experience and grown up immersed in their culture and maintain strong ties to their traditions, practices, languages, and communities.
* Others may have experienced cultural disconnection due to factors such as urbanization, residential schools, the sixties scoop or intergenerational trauma, and may be in the process of reconnecting with their cultural heritage.
* Others may have limited exposure to their Indigenous culture and traditional practices and may be exploring or learning about it for the first time.

It's essential for managers to approach each individual with cultural sensitivity and respect for their unique experiences and identities.

## Barriers in the workplace

Managers should be mindful of potential cultural barriers, stereotypes, and discrimination that Indigenous students may face during their onboarding in the workplace. This includes:

* being aware of unconscious biases, promoting cultural competency among all staff, and fostering an authentic environment of respect and inclusion.
* ensuring Indigenous students have access to supportive networks and mentorship opportunities, as well as flexibility to balance cultural responsibilities and traditional practices with work commitments.
* being vigilant against cultural appropriation and tokenism by ensuring that Indigenous cultures and traditional practices are treated with genuine respect and understanding.

By addressing these considerations, managers can create a welcoming and supportive environment where Indigenous students feel valued and can thrive professionally.

# The basics of student onboarding

Onboarding starts with the acceptance of the job offer and continues through the first weeks or months of employment. It normally happens in four stages:

1. pre-arrival
2. the first day and the first week
3. first month
4. the remaining months of the work term.

Detailed information on how to best support students according to each stage of the work term can be found in the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer’s [Guide to onboarding new employees](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/gcwiki/images/7/74/Guide_to_Onboarding_for_Student_Employees.pdf) and [Guide to Onboarding for Student Employees](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/The_Guide_to_Onboarding_for_Student_Employees).

Ensuring a comprehensive orientation and onboarding experience should be part of your organization’ support tools. To complement your organization’s onboarding resources, we encourage you to share these resources with your Indigenous students:

* [Onboarding: what to expect on your first day, weeks and months](https://intranet.canada.ca/cdl-dca/cpie-ccea/ob-i-eng.asp)
* ISEO’s [Information Toolkit for Indigenous Students](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/File:Information_Toolkit_for_ISEO_Students_June_5,_2023_e.docx).

# Culturally sensitive supports for Indigenous students in the workplace

## Role of managers

When welcoming new Indigenous students into the workplace, managers should prioritize creating a supportive and inclusive environment including:

* Sharing information on supportive networks, resources, and mentorship opportunities, while also being flexible and accommodating of cultural responsibilities and traditional practices;
* Providing regular feedback, guidance, and recognition of achievements to help Indigenous students feel valued and supported as they integrate into the workplace;
* Remembering that Indigenous students can be exempted from the [hybrid work model](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/staffing/common-hybrid-work-model-federal-public-service.html), if working out of their community is critical to their identity. If you have hired a student that works remotely, review the [Manager Guide: Onboarding Students During COVID-19.](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/tools/jobaids/mngr-guide-onboard-covid-eng.aspx)

The following sections contain resources to assist managers in achieving these goals and ensure a successful onboarding.

## Cultural sensitivity training and awareness

To provide a welcoming environment, it is advised to build a relationship and demonstrate an interest in getting to know your student’s work term goals. This is an opportunity for you to learn more about Indigenous cultures and make a great impression of the department for your student. This can be achieved by:

* Ensuring they feel welcomed and part of the team before they arrive and during their work term;
* Being mindful of language used and communication styles, while avoiding stereotypes and cultural assumptions;
* Discussing any accommodations needs related to cultural responsibilities or practices;
* Encouraging open communication and establishing a safe space for employees to express concerns or needs.

Discover how you can become more culturally aware with the following resources:

* [Indigenous Ally Toolkit](https://reseaumtlnetwork.com/en/publication/ally-toolkit/)
* [Making a Difference in Supporting the Careers of Indigenous Employees](https://catalogue.csps-efpc.gc.ca/product?catalog=IRA144&cm_locale=en)
* [Roadmap for Managers of Indigenous Employees](https://catalogue.csps-efpc.gc.ca/product?catalog=IRA1-PA2&cm_locale=en)
* [Understanding Indigenous Realities: Revitalization and Reconciliation](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/video/understanding-indigenous-realities-eng.aspx).

## Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

Establishing relationships through mentorship and networking allows students to communicate their ambitions, aspirations and potentially see themselves as future federal public servants. The ISEO features a mentorship component and provides access to mentors to support students in their career and professional development. Encourage your students to seek out one of the dedicated [ISEO mentors](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/Indigenous_Student_Employment_Opportunity_-_MENTORSHIP)!

Other types of support you can offer your Indigenous student in this area:

* Connect your student with your department’s Indigenous employee network if one exists;
* Find out if your organisation has a buddy program. Pairing new Indigenous students with other Indigenous employees is an efficient way to ensure they navigate their work term in a culturally safe environment.

## Wellness and wellbeing

Indigenous individuals may experience higher rates of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and trauma, due to historical and intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and socio-economic disparities. These factors can impact their performance and well-being in the workplace. Being trauma-informed means understanding the widespread impact of trauma, recognizing the signs and symptoms, and responding with sensitivity and empathy to support healing and resilience. The following resources are available to support students and managers:

* [Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/mental-health-workplace.html)
* [Employee Assistance Program](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/occupational-health-safety/employee-assistance-services/employee-assistance-program.html)
* [Managing Trauma at Work](https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/managing-trauma-at-work)
* [Mental Health Learning Series](https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/mental-health-eng.aspx).

Spiritual health is extremely important to many people, including Indigenous public servants. The following resources include healing lodges, quiet spaces and Elders’ teachings and are available to Indigenous students:

* [Circle of Nations](mailto:circleofnations-cercledesnations@nrcan-rncan.gc.ca)
* [Iskotew Lodge](mailto:sac.iskotew.isc@canada.ca)
* [Knowledge Circle for Indigenous Inclusion - wellness](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/KCII/wellness)
* [Kumik Elders Lodge](https://rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013748/1594319789915)
* [Spiritual wellness for Indigenous employees](https://intranet.canada.ca/cdl-dca/cpie-ccea/swie-bsea-eng.asp).

## Self-Identification and Identity

Getting to know your student and having a conversation around self-identification is a great opportunity for a discussion and learning. Some students who [self-declare](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/appointment-framework/employment-equity-diversity/self-declaration-information.html) will, once hired, self-identify as Indigenous. Indigenous youth are starting to embrace more and more their cultural identity in the workplace and supporting this in any way we can with open dialogue and genuine interest is a step towards reconciliation.

## End of term

The implementation of a feedback mechanism is crucial. Establishing a platform where employees can share their experiences and suggestions for improving the workplace environment allows for continuous learning and improvement. It is recommended to conduct an exit interview that includes questions about the student’s experiences with bias, racism, discrimination, harassment and cultural insensitivity. This approach ensures that the workplace is not only culturally aware but actively seeks to create an authentic environment where all individuals, including those with Indigenous backgrounds, feel valued and respected.

# Other resources to foster inclusive workplaces

* [Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology Program](https://www.canada.ca/en/shared-services/corporate/aaact-program.html)
* [Career Pathways for Indigenous employees](https://intranet.canada.ca/cdl-dca/cpie-ccea/eo-ai-eng.asp)
* [Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/gcwiki/index.php?title=Employment_Opportunities_for_Talent_with_Disabilities_Resource_Page&redirect=no%7C)
* [Federal Youth Network](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/Federal_Youth_Network/Home)
* [GC Students](https://wiki.gccollab.ca/GCStudents_-_%C3%89tudiantsGC)
* [Guide to Mitigating Biases and Barriers in Assessment](http://extranet.psc-cfp.gc.ca/gcintra/pss-dfp/guide-mitigating-biases-assessment-eng.htm)
* [Hiring persons with disabilities: Managers Toolkit](http://extranet.psc-cfp.gc.ca/hiring-pwd-toolkit/index-eng.htm)
* [Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit](http://extranet.psc-cfp.gc.ca/gcintra/irt-bori/best-practices-eng.htm)
* [Indigenous Recruitment Toolbox](http://extranet.psc-cfp.gc.ca/sib-dgsi/indigenous-recruitment-toolbox-eng.htm)
* [Removing Barriers](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/public-service-hiring-guides/Fair-assessment-diverse-workplace/removing-barriers-part-5.html).

# Testimonial from a past participant

A person smiling for a picture

Description automatically generated“*When I was in my fourth year of studies in health sciences, I took a one-year*[*Federal Student Work Experience job*](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/jobs/services/recruitment/students/federal-student-work-program.html)*with Indigenous Services Canada. My team brought me in to work on every file they touched, so I could get as much experience as possible. […] My advice for managers: create a specific student onboarding guide and include links to Indigenous programming and networks. Being a new student in the federal public service is overwhelming. I compiled an onboarding guide for the students coming after me. It contained links to all the possible resources a student could use, like GCconnex, student wiki pages and healing lodges, as well a list of popular acronyms and our department’s scope and mission”.*

# Contact us!

Our team remains available to provide advice and support you in your recruitment efforts. For questions or comments, email the [Indigenous Centre of expertise](mailto:cea.cfp-icoe.psc@cfp-psc.gc.ca).