



Orientation: Laying Out the Welcome Mat (or Not) for New Employees

**BEST PRACTICE
PEER-REVIEWED**

CLENISE PLATT 

 **VIRGINIA TECH.**
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

A strategic focus and goal for many libraries is to provide welcoming environments for each of their customers. Just as libraries focus strategically on welcoming their customers, it is important that they focus on the goal of providing welcoming environments for each of their employees. One of the first opportunities to “lay out the welcome mat” for staff is with the organization’s orientation. The employee orientation is a one-time event that welcomes new employees and provides a general overview of the organization. The employee onboarding process is a series of events and trainings that allows the new hires to acquire the knowledge, skills, tools and resources to be successful employees in the organization. The orientation is an important part of the overall onboarding process. Research and advisory services firm Brandon Hall Group found that organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82 percent and new hire productivity by over 70 percent.¹ According to Dewar, a scarcity of talent and high turnover are two of the biggest challenges facing organizations today.² That is why it is important to ensure that organizations design and implement an efficient and effective onboarding process that includes a strong orientation. Thriving and proficient orientation programs are always evolving to accommodate the growth of the organization and the changing times. The way two Virginia libraries redesigned their orientation programs to better serve their new hires and enhance their onboarding process are highlighted in this article. Additionally, strategies to develop a library orientation event that fosters an inclusive environment and supports the mission and work of the library and promotes employee productivity, engagement and satisfaction are presented.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Clenise Platt

Virginia Beach Public Library, US
crotary06@gmail.com

KEYWORDS:

orientation; onboarding;
new hires; inclusion; retention;
engagement

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Platt C. “Orientation: Laying Out the Welcome Mat (or Not) for New Employees.” *Virginia Libraries* 67, no. 1 (2023): 2, pp. 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v67i1.641>

INTRODUCTION

First impressions can go a long way in personal and professional relationships. Studies show that employees who feel welcome and valued from day one will experience greater job satisfaction, better job performance, and decreased stress.³ New member orientation is an important first event that can set the tone for the employee's tenure with the organization. Statistics show that a negative onboarding experience results in new hires being two times more likely to look for other opportunities.⁴

Two libraries in Virginia revamped their orientation processes to create a more structured and integrated experience for their new employees to benefit both the organization and the employees. Located in Chesterfield, Virginia, Chesterfield County Public Library (CCPL) has just under 200 staff members and consists of 10 branches and 8 departments. The Virginia Beach Public Library (VBPL) in Virginia Beach, Virginia, employs close to 300 staff and has 11 locations (10 branches) and 14 departments.

ON PURPOSE

Purpose-driven orientations that provide a cohesive program help with employee retention, engagement, and performance. The orientation is the introduction of the work environment to newly recruited employees who are coming to the organization from a variety of personal and professional experiences. It is an opportunity to inform and prepare new members and make them feel welcome, supported, and like a valued part of the organization. According to Talya Bauer, Ph.D., author of *Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success*, there are four distinct levels of onboarding. The four levels are listed below from the least to the most effective.

- **Compliance** provides information about legal and policy-related issues.
- **Clarification** ensures new employees understand their new role and the related expectations.
- **Culture** informs new hires of the organizational values and norms.
- **Connection** fosters personal relationships and information networks for new hires.⁵

Chesterfield County Public Library (CCPL) and Virginia Beach Public Library (VBPL) originally offered a four-hour orientation process for new hires. After evaluating the existing orientation programs, one of the first changes the two libraries made was to extend the length of their orientation training sessions. CCPL (12 hour) and VBPL (8

hour) currently provide an orientation experience for new members that is purpose-driven.

According to Michelle Jones, Librarian/Training Coordinator at CCPL, the purpose of their orientation is to educate and orientate new hires on the departmental structure, cultural values, technological resources, and institutional policies. The orientation also seeks to engage and foster camaraderie among new colleagues. The library trainer and human resource department used information gathered from staff including managers to help restructure the orientation. The CCPL orientation program consists of Library Bootcamp (part I) and Basic Training (part II). Each part occurs during two days of the same week. During the sessions, staff receive a booklet, an organizational chart, information about the organization's culture and engage in ice breakers and activities to foster connection.

After discussing the needs of the organization with the library executive team, branch managers, supervisors, staff members, and other stakeholders, the VBPL Staff Development Coordinator, Clenise Platt, developed the VBPL orientation program, Square One. Square One, is a full day program that includes a variety of experiences designed to help new hires excel during their employment at VBPL. Square One's purpose is to introduce new hires to the library's values, mission, and strategic focus, as well as several VBPL programs, resources, services, and staff members. While staff receive an overview of important VBPL and city policies and procedures and information about each of the branches and departments, they also spend time fostering personal relationships and information networks.

Both the CCPL and VBPL orientation programs are designed with purpose and include the four C's Bauer identified. As stated by Bauer, orientation programs that include compliance, clarification, culture, and connection help new hires feel welcome and prepared for their jobs. These orientations allow new employees to successfully contribute to the organization's mission faster and become productive sooner than programs without the four C's.⁶

PLANNING AND BUILDING AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Successful orientations are intentionally built around the organization's mission, values, goals, and strategic focuses and offered on a consistent basis. The best programs are engaging, instructive and memorable. The best orientation programs are carefully planned and organized and focus on the people attending. An organization's orientation should not simply check off an item on a human resources' to-do

list or center around organizational processes or collecting employee paperwork. Since the orientation is one of the first events a new employee attends, special attention should be paid to each detail. Programs that are well designed and delivered raise the employee's enthusiasm and excitement about the organization and their position within the organization. Successful orientation programs are also comprehensive and standardized to ensure each new member is receiving the same message and information. They enlighten the attendees, highlight the organization, and include opportunities for sharing and learning about the other attendees. According to Dewar, one study conducted by Human Capital Institute found that one-third of employees globally stated that their onboarding program was informal, inconsistent, or reactive rather than proactive.⁷ Studies show that organizations with a standard onboarding process, however, experience 50 percent greater new-hire productivity according to Click Boarding.⁸

For CCPL, it was important to devote more time to the new hire experience to cover all the material new hires needed to learn. Prior to the pandemic, the library was in the process of revamping their four-hour orientation process. As a result of the pandemic, project orientation pivoted to a virtual format as CCPL transitioned to a more robust new hire orientation training. The transition from four to twelve hours allowed the CCPL orientation program to concentrate on updated library topics and include more IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity and access) examples throughout the training. The revised orientation program also includes an updated training site and new onboarding documents. More shadowing opportunities and a new suite of online courses for staff have also been added to the onboarding process. The increased time and the addition of the new changes were implemented to help staff feel more prepared for their roles.

VBPL also increased the amount of time dedicated to their new hire orientation. Originally, based upon the feedback from the library executive team and other stakeholders, Square One, the VBPL orientation program, increased from four hours to 24 hours of training. Each of the three days had a specific theme and focus.

The first day consisted of presentations by each of the library executive team members. They provided a synopsis of the public services, administrative services (library and city policies and procedures), marketing and communications, support services, and the VBPL Foundation. It also included presentations by various members of the Library Advisory and Friends of the Library Boards, lunch with the Director, and several activities for the attendees to introduce themselves and become better acquainted with each other.

The second day included field trips to a library branch, a tour, activities such as a "Day in the Life of a Book," and presentations about professional development and staff training opportunities, library finance procedures, and HR details about compensation, benefits, and leave. Presentations were also conducted about a variety of subject matters (e.g., service and recognition activities, disability services, youth and outreach programs, and the VBPL tech show & play), and panels with staff members at different places in their career at VBPL were included. When possible, the bookmobile would take a road trip to the orientation site for staff to tour. The VBPL bookmobile was always a highlight of the second day.

During the third day, staff members attended technology training that was designed in conjunction with the technology training coordinator and the VBPL technology track staff in the technology services computer lab. If the technology training did not apply to an employee's job, the employee had the option of shadowing another employee or going to their work location and returning for the orientation graduation ceremony, One Thing. During the One Thing closing ceremony, each new hire shared one thing they learned or that impressed them during the orientation. One Thing allowed the participants to reflect on what they experienced during the day and to share a special moment with each other at the conclusion of the program. Previous ceremonies have included serious poignant moments and funny moments as the new hires provided their personal stories or thoughts about their experiences.

Each day occurred at a different location to give staff an opportunity to visit different branches while attending the orientation sessions. Sometimes the orientation was held at an off-site location as well. Many of the sessions were designed and facilitated by VBPL staff members. The three-day comprehensive orientation provided staff with an opportunity to have a more in-depth introduction to VBPL.

EVER EVOLVING AND CHANGING

Although orientation programs should be structured and standardized, they should not be stagnant or inflexible. A thriving and efficient orientation program is always evolving and changing with the organization and the times. Recognizing the necessity to adjust is an important part of any process.

Based upon feedback, the VBPL library leadership determined that a single day of training would allow staff to return to their roles and responsibilities in their branches and departments quicker. As a result, the three-day Square One transitioned to eight hours. As a single-day event, the

VBPL orientation includes the presentations by each of the library executive team members, staff development, library finance, human resources, and the One Thing closing ceremony. Technology and other VBPL exclusive trainings are offered throughout the year for staff to attend and continue to learn and grow. During the pandemic, Square One made another pivot to a virtual format.

It is important to take the time to design an engaging online experience since it is impossible to reproduce an in-person experience with a virtual platform. However, with additional planning, creative activities, and opportunities for participants to be interactive throughout the day, the virtual orientations can still be fun, instructive, and memorable. When the pandemic began, CCPL also transitioned to a virtual orientation program. During the orientation, the facilitators discovered that digital equity did not only apply to library customers, but to library staff as well. New staff members needed computers and reliable Wi-Fi to access virtual training or tech assistance. A line was added to the welcoming email to new employees that asked if they needed technology or internet access for the orientation. If employees were using their cell phones because they did not have a laptop, time was allotted for them to charge their mobile devices. In addition, the option was provided for new hires to use a library computer if they felt safe coming on site.

Each orientation is an opportunity for the facilitators and presenters to learn about how they can serve new hires better and continue to enhance the orientation program and onboarding process. In addition, asking for staff feedback is a helpful way to ensure that the orientation program continues to positively develop and improve. VBPL Square One participants receive a survey to share their thoughts and suggestions about the day and their experiences. Those attending the CCPL orientation receive a survey. Circulation supervisors also provide feedback during their meetings.

Even though each new employee class is different from the number of attendees to the personalities of the new hires and the participation level of the participants, each class deserves a cohesive, well-organized, engaging orientation. That is why it is important for the orientation process to change and evolve over time to ensure that the information and experience provided remains relevant and valuable to each new class.

TAILORING AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR YOUR LIBRARY

There is no “one size fits all” when designing an orientation program for an organization. According to Gallup, only 12%

of employees strongly agree that their organization does a great job of onboarding new employees. Also, according to Gallup analytics, nearly one in five employees either report that their most recent onboarding was poor — or that they received no onboarding at all.⁹ It is worth the time and effort to create and facilitate a strong onboarding process that includes an effective and compelling orientation experience. Jen Dewar from SaplingHR reported that employees who say they had exceptional onboarding experiences are 2.6 times more likely to be extremely satisfied with their workplace.¹⁰

Successful onboarding programs begin before the new hire’s first day at work and are influenced by the organization’s leaders and the employees’ managers, supervisors, and coworkers. In an online survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder and SilkRoad, 93 percent of employers agreed a good onboarding experience was critical to influencing a new hire’s decision to stay with the organization.¹¹ This decision to stay is also affected by the organization’s leaders and the employees’ managers, supervisors, and coworkers. Because it takes time for an employee to become comfortable and reach their potential in their role, managers and supervisors play a vital role in the onboarding process. According to Gallup, when managers are actively involved in the onboarding process, employees are 3.4 times as likely to strongly agree their onboarding experience was exceptional.¹²

An essential component of the onboarding process is the orientation program. There are some specific factors that should be considered when designing or redesigning an organization’s orientation.

1. Recognize that a strong orientation program is a key part of a comprehensive onboarding process. A strong orientation program is essential for a positive employee experience. However, the orientation program is only one part of the onboarding process. Gallup found that new employees typically take approximately 12 months to reach their full performance potential in their new position.¹³ It is important to incorporate a team approach instead of identifying onboarding as only the responsibility of the trainer, staff development coordinator, or human resources department. A productive and effective comprehensive onboarding process requires an investment of time, money, and commitment from staff at every level within the library. In fact, statistics show that investing more in communication and engagement during the pre-boarding process can improve the onboarding experience by 83 percent. Pre-boarding consists of strategies to connect the new employee to the

organization before their official start date. This includes communicating goals, introducing new team members to their colleagues, and offering to answer questions.¹⁴ Requesting the new employee's email address, securing their keys and ID badge, and making sure they have a workstation with the necessary supplies and materials are also a part of the preboarding process. Jen Dewar of Sapling HR advocates that organizations overinvest in ensuring that employees feel welcome and aligned with the organization's goals.¹⁵

Engagement levels tend to be highest during the first 90 days of employment, as new hires typically are in the throes of the "honeymoon period," according to Teryluz Andreu, North America culture and engagement leader at Aon.¹⁶ Managers and supervisors can help employees remain engaged beyond the honeymoon period by staying connected and communicating. They can periodically check on the employee beyond the first 90 days, recommend trainings and programs to foster professional development, serve as a resource to answer questions and provide information, and introduce them to coworkers who can be an additional resource or connection for them.

Managers and supervisors greatly influence the daily working environment for their employees and have a significant impact on an employee's tenure with the organization. The findings from a 2019 Catalyst report revealed that a manager's behavior has a direct link to an employee's experience of inclusion — in fact, almost half of an employee's experience of inclusion can be explained by managerial inclusive leadership behaviors.¹⁷ A simple but integral way managers and supervisors can positively affect an employee's onboarding process is by providing clear, specific goals and expectations. By doing this the manager and supervisor create an environment that allows employees to feel or be empowered through accountability and ownership. Employees are made aware of the behavior, development, and work processes they are responsible for (accountability). They also have the freedom to solve their own problems and make their own decisions (ownership). Another way managers and supervisors can have a positive influence is by providing productive feedback and support while the employee works to meet the identified goals and expectations.

A new hire onboarding checklist is a valuable tool in the onboarding process. A checklist includes a list of trainings, paperwork, activities, and processes that need to be completed within a specific time frame.

The checklist provides an organized method to communicate the expectations of the organization in a clear, consistent manner across departments.¹⁸ The list is a helpful tool for both the employee and those responsible for the identified tasks or paperwork included on the checklist.

Another component that can be beneficial in the onboarding process is a mentorship program. The Brandon Hall Group research found that two in three high performance onboarding programs include formal mentorship and coaching to help ensure speedy and lasting assimilation.¹⁹ In a formal or informal mentorship program, new hires may ask mentors questions and share perspectives they are uncomfortable communicating with their supervisor. Mentors also provide political and social insight that can be invaluable to the new employee.²⁰ When Square One was originally developed, one of the planned additions included providing opportunities for new hires to participate in a future mentorship program. VBPL recently launched a mentor program that is open to all employees, including new hires.

2. When preparing the content for orientation, request input from the library executive team, other leaders, current staff members, and recently hired staff. Invite library leaders and board members to be presenters for orientation. Organization and management development expert Karen Lawson noted that support from the executive leaders of an organization is essential to successful onboarding.²¹ Their commitment to and participation in the orientation makes a significant impression on the new hires and helps to communicate what the organization values. Their involvement during the orientation also fosters opportunities for new staff members to engage with the library's executive team and build relationships with management.
- In addition, inviting a variety of staff members to serve as presenters allows the new recruits to begin to build a network of individuals who can provide resources, information, and assistance as they navigate the workplace. Participating staff members also have a chance to build their presentation skills, highlight their expertise, represent the organization, and share stories about their experience with the library. It also keeps the orientation interesting and engaging for the new members, since they have an opportunity to hear different voices and observe different presentation styles.
3. Incorporate the library's values, mission, and priorities into every part of the orientation and onboarding process.

It is vital to determine the priorities and consistent messages to communicate at every level throughout your library, and to ensure they are included during the entire onboarding process. The priorities, values and mission of an organization help to create the organization's identity. That identity is what makes the organization unique. It is important for the organization to highlight its identity often and clearly to new hires and existing employees. Additionally, that distinctive identity, informed by the library's values, mission and priorities, should be embedded in the operations of the organization. In an article for the World Economic Forum, it was reported that 61% of employees choose, leave, avoid, or consider employers based on their values and beliefs.²² Consider what makes your library special and unique and be sure to communicate it to new hires in a variety of creative ways during the entire onboarding and orientation process.

According to research from Qualtrics, employees who say their company's mission, vision and values align with their own are far more likely to recommend their employer as a great place to work (70% vs. 25%) and to say their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment (72% vs. 29%). Additionally, they are less likely to say they are thinking about leaving their current employer (33% vs. 44%).²³

One of the choices CCPL made regarding their orientation program was to include more IDEA examples. Incorporating these examples throughout the day conveys how the library values IDEA. Although VBPL consists of 10 branches it was important for the organization to emphasize that it was and operated as one organization. This message of "One Library" spoke to the inclusion and value of all staff, departments, and branch across the organization. It was a message that leadership wanted to communicate and appreciate at every level. That message of inclusion is also reflected throughout Square One. The name has the word "one" in it, and the activities are designed to facilitate the opportunity for staff from every department to work together and form relationships, and for every staff member to feel welcomed and like a valued member of VBPL.

4. Provide training, resources, and support for the orientation presenters.

The orientation presenters are an invaluable part of the program. It is important to provide them with the tools that they need to be successful. At VBPL the staff development coordinator worked with the creative services coordinator to design PowerPoint templates for staff presenters. When staff presenters use the Square One PowerPoint template, it helps to ensure

that there is a consistency in brand and the look of the presentations. In addition, the creative services coordinator is available to work personally with the library executive team members on their presentations for each Square One presentation. When Square One moved to the virtual format, the staff development coordinator scheduled practice sessions for all of the presenters to acclimate themselves to the new virtual platform. Additionally, when the presenters have specific information they want provided, the staff development coordinator will make the necessary copies or provide the materials electronically to the attendees. Another important fact to keep in mind is the importance of thanking the presenters. Whether it is a personal acknowledgement during the orientation program or a note sent after the event, it is essential to express appreciation for their participation.

5. Make the orientation a special event.

Although the orientation may be a standardized program in some cases, it is the new hire's first and most likely only orientation session with the library. Take the time to make the orientation feel special for each class. Select a site that will elevate the orientation experience and that will permit attendees to have personal space yet easily engage with each other. Instead of your standard conference room or classroom, choose a room with a view or a creative and rarely used or unused area on site for the orientation (e.g., room with a fireplace or collaboration room). Consider hosting the orientation offsite at a community partner's location that can provide the space for free. Wherever the place, ensure the room is set up to foster engagement and participation. The way the room is arranged can play a major role in facilitating both. The seating arrangements, how attendees receive content and their interactions with each other is important and influences both the speaker's effectiveness and the audience's participation.

If there is a budget, provide refreshments and special gifts for the participants. In addition, provide everyone with a name tag and a folder or notebook with all the library materials and information provided by the presenters that staff will need throughout the orientation. Include a sheet with acronyms specific to the organization to help with the acclimation process as well. Make sure to send information to virtual participants prior to the event. Another option is to go green and send all materials electronically; just remind staff members to have a writing utensil and paper available during orientation.

Whether virtual or in person, ensure that from the moment that each person arrives until the time they

leave the orientation, they feel welcomed and like a valued part of the organization. Cultivate an inclusive environment. An inclusive environment is one in which all employees are comfortable being themselves and contributing fully. Both VBPL and CCPL provide an opportunity for new hires to share any required accommodations prior to the orientation session. During group activities and conversations, encourage everyone to participate. By creating a space for diverse perspectives and ideas based on varied experiences shaped by multiple factors (including age, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, aptitudes, abilities, and economic status), there can be more open dialogue and a richer engaging orientation experience.²⁴ For more on how to incorporate an organization's commitment to IDEA into the onboarding and orientation process, see the Appendix.

6. Personalize the orientation experience.

A personal touch significantly enhances a new hire's participation in the orientation. There are multiple ways to personalize the new member experience. Prior to the day of orientation, send an introduction or invite letter to the participants, providing an overview of what to expect during orientation. In the same letter, ask each staff member to provide how they would like to be addressed, if they need any accommodations, and for a couple of personal interesting facts about themselves. Use the interesting facts provided to help personalize their orientation experience. Using that information to personalize the experience by providing name tags in the participant's favorite color or an ice breaker including their favorite author can help the attendees feel welcomed and heighten their level of satisfaction. Throughout the day, provide opportunities for staff members to ask questions, share their thoughts and collaborate with one another during discussions, activities, and ice breakers.

At the conclusion of the training, provide each member with a certificate of completion and library swag. Accompany this with a personal welcome note or letter signed by the orientation facilitator or, if possible, the entire library executive team. During the virtual VBPL orientations, the staff development coordinator delivered the Square One certificate, swag bag, and note to the respective branches for each new member. The ultimate goal for each orientation session is to ensure new employees know that they matter, and that the library is invested in their future and success.

7. Integrate fun and celebration throughout the orientation program.

Orientation programs that are focused more on the processes and policies instead of the new hires

attending the event, make for a long, uninspiring, and overwhelming experience. Although an orientation program may incorporate a lot of information in each of the training sessions, it is equally important to plan for fun and celebrations as the program unfolds. According to the Brandon Hall Group, 33% of high-performance onboarding programs build social networking into the onboarding process.²⁵ The CFI report found that providing time for new employees to get to know other employees helps avoid feelings of isolation, which can make a new worker less productive.²⁶ This is also true when employees join new teams based on their role within the organization. Strategies to increase social networking include:

- facilitating engaging and creative activities that allow participants to socialize and share personal anecdotes;
- providing opportunities for new hires to share their thoughts and perspectives about the organization or topics presented;
- and giving away library swag as gifts and prizes throughout orientation.

Whether the orientation is virtual or in-person, these strategies and more may be used to create an entertaining and enjoyable employee learning experience.

During the VBPL graduation ceremony, One Thing, staff receive a certificate of completion and a VBPL tote bag filled with VBPL swag. A closing ceremony is another way to incorporate a fun celebration into the orientation.

8. Highlight the organization's commitment to professional development and training during the orientation program.

Training and talent development should be an essential part of the employee's work experience throughout their time with the organization. This fact should be communicated from the beginning of the new hire's relationship with the library. There are multiple benefits associated with investing in staff. The LinkedIn's 2019 Workplace Learning Report determined that "94% of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development."²⁷

Career development is the leading reason people leave their jobs.²⁸ When new hires observe an organization's ongoing support for staff learning, training, and coaching, they see a future with that organization that includes growth and potential career advancement. It is important to communicate the opportunities for professional growth and development available to staff as employees during the orientation event. Employee

satisfaction increases 3.5 times when employee development is addressed during the onboarding process.²⁹ If there is a budget to fund professional learning opportunities for staff, inform the new hires of how to access that funding. Also, if there are specific trainings available for staff offered by the library, give the new recruits examples of the types of trainings offered and instructions for how to sign up for them. For professional growth to be a priority, it must be supported at all levels within the organization and there must be a commitment of time, resources, and financial support. The dedication to staff development should exist at every stage during the employee's tenure with the library. In addition, for professional development to be effective and increase productivity, it must be tailored to fit the organization's needs as it grows and develops.

At VBPL, incoming staff are introduced to the Staff Development SharePoint page, which contains an extensive collection of information such as daily free training offerings, VBPL scholarship opportunities, and a calendar that lists upcoming national conferences and VBPL trainings. Staff are informed that because of VBPL's VLA membership, employees are automatically enrolled as an affiliate member of the Virginia Library Association, a professional organization. The site also has links to pertinent TED talks and other professional development materials, and a form staff may use to have completed trainings added to their transcripts.

9. Encourage all new hires and existing employees who did not previously attend the orientation program to participate.

According to the CFI team, every new recruit, regardless of their position within the organization, needs to experience the orientation program.³⁰ When every new hire and newly promoted employee attends a well-designed and engaging orientation program, they have a deeper understanding of how their role fits within the organization's structure and how to apply the organization's values, goals, strategic focuses, and mission. They also have the opportunity to grow their network and cultivate important relationships and to become even more engaged and excited about the organization.

When new employees who serve in executive leadership positions determine that it is unnecessary or time does not permit them to attend the library's new member orientation, they miss out on important information and the chance to make valuable observations about the library and how it engages with new hires. They also miss the opportunity to develop

personal relationships with staff at every level, and to foster important information networks. When new executive leaders join the organization and skip the new member orientation, they may inadvertently communicate to staff that the orientation program is not equally valuable or important to every employee. In addition, newly-promoted employees who attend the orientation program or "reboard," increase awareness of new library programs, learn more about the organization, and tend to have a deeper understanding of their work. They can also be valuable resources of information for new hires in the class. Oftentimes the reboarded employees maintain relationships with the new hires after the orientation. As a result of that relationship, the new hires have someone who can answer questions, provide feedback and possibly serve as an informal mentor. A possible outcome of reboarding is increased productivity in a shorter time period. Reboarding can also result in stronger engagement and job satisfaction by providing employees with a chance to connect emotionally and socially to the other employees and their work.³¹

10. Evaluate the orientation program often.

It is important for new member orientation programs to remain up to date and relevant. Communities and societies continually change, and libraries often need to alter their policies, procedures, and strategic plans to accommodate this. Presentations and information packets should reflect any updates. The expectations, needs, and requirements of those seeking employment also change. It is necessary to adjust the orientation program to respond to those changes too. If there are modifications made to the orientation program, ensure that the agenda and presentations include those changes (e.g., department names or employees in new positions).

Formal and informal feedback from attendees can be a tool to help evaluate orientation. During the graduation celebration, One Thing, at VBPL, staff have an opportunity to share their thoughts about the day. Allowing for reflection in the moment is a valuable way to collect immediate feedback about the orientation process.

One of the most valuable ways to evaluate the program is to provide a survey to new members after they have completed the orientation session. They often include important feedback that can be helpful to contribute to a more effective and efficient orientation. Research shows when employers ask for feedback, new hires are 91 percent more willing to increase their relationship out of the gate. This is crucial for reducing 90-day turnover and increasing long-term retention.³²

SUMMARY

When libraries provide a strong orientation program as a part of a comprehensive onboarding process, they increase the likelihood that staff will be more productive, engaged and stay with the organization longer. Even though the orientation is a part of the overall onboarding process, it is a special event that is instrumental in the development and engagement of a new employee and the organization. As noted by one CCPL librarian, “orientation impacts everyone! Every time a new person is onboarded, the complexion of the organization changes.”

When new hires experience poorly planned and executed orientation programs, they may decide that the organization does not value its employees or is poorly managed. New employees are 58% more likely to be with an organization after three years if they went through a structured onboarding program.³³ When libraries take the time to research, evaluate, and design an orientation program centered around their identity that is structured and organized, staff are more likely to feel valued and like an important contributor to the organization’s mission. The priority and value placed on the onboarding process and orientation program by the library’s leadership indicates how staff are prioritized and valued within the organization.

Timothy Healy, former President of the New York Public Library, stated the most important asset of the library goes home every night: the library staff.³⁴ From the moment a new hire says yes, the way the library engages with them sets the stage for how the staff member will engage with the library during their tenure with the organization. By investing the time, tools, relationships, and support needed in new staff members, the library not only helps to ensure the success of the new hire, but also the organization over time.

NOTES

- 1 Madeline Laurano, “Research Brief,” *Brandon Hall Group*, August 2015.
- 2 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022,” accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 3 Karen Lawson, “Orientation or Onboarding?,” *ATD Online* September 7, 2017, <https://www.td.org/newsletters/atd-links/Orientation-or-onboarding>.
- 4 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2021,” accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2021>.
- 5 Arlene S. Hirsch, “Don’t Underestimate the Importance of Good Onboarding,” August 10, 2017, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/dont-underestimate-the-importance-of-effective-onboarding.aspx>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022,” accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 8 Click Boarding, “18 Jaw-Dropping Onboarding Stats You Need to Know,” accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.clickboarding.com/18-jaw-dropping-onboarding-stats-you-need-to-know/>.
- 9 Emily Wetherell and Bailey Nelson, “8 Practical Tips for Leaders for a Better Onboarding Process,” *Gallup*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/353096/practical-tips-leaders-better-onboarding-process.aspx>.
- 10 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022,” accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 11 Julie Cook Ramirez, “The Increasing Importance of Onboarding,” *Human Resource Executive*, December 10, 2018, <https://hrxexecutive.com/the-increasing-importance-of-onboarding/>.
- 12 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022,” accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 13 Ben Wigert and Ryan Pendell, “7 Problems With Your Onboarding Program,” *Gallup*, March 1, 2019.
- 14 Jen Dewar, “10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022,” accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 15 Jen Dewar, “Top Employee Onboarding Programs,” March 1, 2022.
- 16 Julie Cook Ramirez, “The Increasing Importance of Onboarding,” *Human Resource Executive*, December 10, 2018, <https://hrxexecutive.com/the-increasing-importance-of-onboarding/>.
- 17 Catalyst. “Getting Real About Inclusive Leadership Report,” November 21, 2019, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/inclusive-leadership-report/>.
- 18 “The Importance of a New Employee Onboarding Checklist and How to Create One,” *FirstPRO*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.firstproinc.com/recruiters/the-importance-of-a-new-employee-onboarding-checklist-and-how-to-create-one/>.
- 19 Madeline Laurano, “Research Brief,” *Brandon Hall Group*, August 2015.
- 20 Bauer, T.N. & Erdogan, B. (2011), “Organizational Socialization: The Effective Onboarding of New Employees,” In *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol 3: *Maintaining, Expanding and Contracting the Organization* (pp 51–64), Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- 21 Karen Lawson, “Orientation or Onboarding?,” *ATD Online*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.td.org/newsletters/atd-links/Orientation-or-onboarding>.
- 22 Andrea Willige, “The Rise of the ‘Belief-Driven’ Employee,” *World Economic Forum*, September 27, 2021.
- 23 Qualtrics, “Employees Who Feel Aligned with Company Values are More Likely to Stay,” April 25, 2022, <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/company-values-employee-retention/>.
- 24 Allan Halcrow, “Five Steps To Ensure Onboarding Diverse Employees Fosters Inclusion,” *Culture Wizard*, December 5, 2018, <https://www.rw-3.com/blog/five-steps-to-ensure-onboarding-diverse-employees-fosters-inclusion>.
- 25 Madeline Laurano, “Research Brief,” *Brandon Hall Group*, August 2015.
- 26 CFI Team, “New Employee Orientation: The process in which new hires are introduced to their jobs and work environments,” updated March 20, 2021, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/recruiting-search/new-employee-Orientation/>.
- 27 LinkedIn Learning, “3rd Annual 2019 Workplace Learning Report: Why 2019 is the Breakout Year for the Talent Developer,” <https://learning.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/amp/learning-solutions/images/workplace-learning-report-2019/pdf/workplace-learning-report-2019.pdf>.

- 28 Jen Dewar, "10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022," accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 CFI Team, "New Employee Orientation. The process in which new hires are introduced to their jobs and work environments," accessed June 20, 2022, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/recruiting-search/new-employee-Orientation/>.
- 31 SHRM, "Understanding Employee Onboarding," accessed June 2022, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/understanding-employee-onboarding.aspx>.
- 32 Jen Dewar, "10 Employee Onboarding Statistics You Must Know in 2022," accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.saplinghr.com/10-employee-onboarding-statistics-you-must-know-in-2022>.
- 33 Click Boarding, "18 Jaw-Dropping Onboarding Stats You Need to Know," accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.clickboarding.com/18-jaw-dropping-onboarding-stats-you-need-to-know/>.
- 34 Librarianship Studies & Information Technology, "Best Quotes About Libraries Librarians and Library and Information Science," September 11, 2022, <https://www.librarianshipstudies.com/2018/05/quotes-libraries-librarians-library-information-science.html>.

ADDITIONAL FILE


The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix.** IDEA FROM DAY ONE: Building an Inclusive and Engaging Orientation Program. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v67i1.641.s1>

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Clenise Platt  orcid.org/0000-0003-0120-5852
Virginia Beach Public Library, US

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Platt C. "Orientation: Laying Out the Welcome Mat (or Not) for New Employees." *Virginia Libraries* 67, no. 1 (2023): 2, pp. 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/valib.v67i1.641>

Submitted: 24 July 2022

Accepted: 07 April 2023

Published: 23 June 2023

COPYRIGHT:

© 2023 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Virginia Libraries is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.