Category: Training, Career Development, and Staff Retention – Work in progress

Crafting a Dynamic Onboarding Program for Clinical Trials Office Employees

K. Traub, S. Bolt, C. Jerome, R. Dampman Weiss, K. Senter, K. Herman

Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center at Jefferson

1. Background
In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, high rates of staff turnover continue. Feelings of not being valued and not belonging are top reasons employees choose to leave an employer. A structured, organized onboarding program can help ameliorate those feelings and build employee engagement. From 2018-2021, the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center (at Jefferson Clinical Trials Office (CTO) had no dedicated staff to onboard new employees. Those years coincided with our turnover rate doubling. Experienced engaged staff are indispensable to our CTO's success.

2. Goals
Our goal was create a structured and consistent training and onboarding experience for newly hired SKCC CTO staff.

3. Solutions and Methods
A dedicated Clinical Research Educator (CRE) was hired in June 2021. The new CRE interviewed employees, including directors, managers, and clinical staff, about their onboarding experiences and training needs. Greater structure and having a "go-to" person to contact for help were chief concerns. This feedback informed the new onboarding program.

4. Outcomes
Upon offer acceptance, the CRE meets with the hiring manager to discuss onboarding plans. This ensures manager input in tailoring the education strategy. Constant communication between the CRE, manager, administrative coordinator (for equipment and system access needs), and even directors bolsters an efficient and productive entry.

Prior to starting, new employees receive a welcome email from the CRE with instructions for their first day. Much of their first week is spent with the CRE, who provides essential information and spends time getting to know them as a person. This helps new employees feel welcome and valued and allows their managers to focus on higher-level content.

Paper training materials were converted to digital content. Previously, employees received a 4-inch binder with over 600 pages of onboarding materials. Specific topics and pages were hard to find and materials seldom used after onboarding was complete. The new system involves cloud-based digital storage, allowing these materials to be accessed anywhere.

Additionally, interactive digital checklists were created to ensure nothing is overlooked and to provide new employees with a sense of structure, organization, and empowerment as they track their own onboarding. Also, detailed orientation schedules are created and shared with new employees, their managers, and selected others, detailing their first weeks. The schedule and checklist are stored on a personalized private onboarding webpage so that everyone works from common documents.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

New employees appreciate the structure and ease of accessing their onboarding content. A second educator was hired recently to expand the current onboarding program, provide more individualized attention, and create new materials and continuing education.

We continue to improve our onboarding checklists, clarifying expectations for the whole team in the onboarding process. In collaboration with our CTO Engagement Committee, an onboarding satisfaction survey is being developed that will be administered at designated time points to ensure new employees' needs are being met.

Aware of potential information overload during onboarding, we have begun inviting current employees to attend refresher sessions and monthly continuing education. We hope to expand the range of topics, work with employees longer and more closely, and collaborate with other staff to create a more comprehensive experience.