An Employee Orientation Program For
Recreation, Sport & Tourism

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2006
A recreation, sport or tourism agency’s orientation program makes an immediate and lasting impression which may mean the difference between a new employee’s success or failure on the job. Employee induction deserves the careful, systematic and ongoing attention of the entire agency. When successful, an orientation program can result in fewer costly and time-consuming mistakes, better customer service through heightened productivity, and improved employee relations – and thus fewer problems with unions, especially concerning grievances.

In the fields of recreation, sport or tourism, induction is the process of familiarizing new employees with whatever is necessary for them to feel at home and to understand and perform their duties efficiently. To put it another way, it is the beginning of a fusion process leading to the integration of agency and employee goals and needs. Without this sense of commonality, employee productivity, performance and morale will suffer.

However, the nature and design of orientation programs will and should vary from agency to agency and from job to job. Customize your agency’s orientation program. Tailor it to fit your agency’s unique situation and needs. Match it to the needs of your employees, also.

The Scope of Orientation

Irrespective of the type of recreation, sport or tourism agency, induction should be concerned with two distinct levels:

1.) **General Company** – Matters of relevance to all employees
2.) **Specific Department** – Topics unique to the new employee’s department and job

The scope of these two programs should also be adapted to the new employee’s job responsibilities, training and past experience in comparable positions. Conversely, some standard coverage of key information about the agency, the department and the job is desirable from both the agency’s and the employee’s standpoint.
Stages of Orientation

There are two types of employee orientation:

1.) **Formal** – Planned and officially conducted by the agency at set times
2.) **Informal** – Unplanned and unofficially conducted by fellow workers

There are also three stages of orientation:

1.) **Preliminary** – Begins with the initial contact between a job applicant and the agency representative
2.) **Preduty** – Just prior to beginning work at the agency
3.) **Continuing** – Goes on until the employee is fully absorbed into the agency.

The most important period for creating job understanding and satisfaction is the preduty phase of formal orientation and the period immediately following. This is when the typical new employee has anxieties and questions about his or her new duties, as well as the new work environment. This, too, is when the employee develops and attitude, whether negative or positive, toward the job.

Session Timing and Duration

It is important to avoid jamming all orientation, especially detailed information, into one long session at the beginning of the job, since there are limits to what any new employee can be expected to absorb, digest and retain during the initial induction session. Brief sessions, not to exceed two hours at a time, are recommended, especially for non-managerial level positions.

Also essential is the follow-up session, which should be held after the employee has been on the job for approximately one month. New problems and concerns affecting both employee and employer will have developed following the initial induction sessions, and these matters need to be discussed for everyone’s benefit.
Key Planning Considerations

**Induction Policy:** Representatives of management and employees alike should jointly propose policy for all significant aspects of the induction program. This proposed policy must then be reviewed and officially adopted by top management, before being shared with all agency employees.

**Budget:** This will, of course, vary from agency to agency. The main point is that the agency budget should not be skimped; induction costs are nominal compared with potential gain.

**Other Planning Considerations:** The planning of a good induction program takes from three to six months. The following checklist itemizes the most important considerations:

- Program goals
- Scope (range of topics), timing and duration of induction sessions
- Preparation time needed to plan and implement program
- Topics to include, methods of organizing and presenting them
- Resources, such as instructional materials, facilities, personnel, and their availability
- Employee handbook topics, organization and provisions for keeping the handbook current
- Technical vs. social aspects of orientation
- Agency orientation topics vs. department and job topics
- Specific training to be conducted by supervisors
- Check list of induction topics to assure follow-up by supervisors
- Training needs of supervisors regarding orientation
- Qualifications and training needs of a “buddy” to assist each supervisor
- Review of other agencies’ mistakes and successes
- Methods for encouraging employee discussion sessions and feedback afterward
- Program flexibility so as to accommodate employee differences in education intelligence and work experience
General and Specific Accountability

Since there are two levels of orientation, agency and departmental, responsibility for induction must be shared by the agency’s personnel staff and the employee’s immediate supervisor. However, the agency’s personnel staff should have the overall responsibility for program planning and follow-up. Specific responsibilities must be spelled out for both levels in order to avoid buck passing, duplication, omission and general confusion.

Therefore, the agency’s personnel staff share of orientation would include such areas as agency history (i.e., mission and goals), current services and operations, as well as employee services: health, safety, pay and retirement.

Then orientation becomes more technical, and the new employee’s immediate supervisor takes over and covers topics such as department boundaries and the employee’s work environment (i.e., office, computers, etc.); job duties, as well as expected results; reporting relationships and how the job relates to other jobs; key policies and operational procedures as they relate to the specific job; working hours, time of lunch, breaks and any other time factors; dress and safety requirements; expected on-the-job conduct, etc.

A busy supervisor with many employees to oversee sometimes delegates the more informal orientation activities to a carefully selected “buddy”. This is perfectly acceptable as long as the buddy understands his or her orientation responsibilities and is given a set of guidelines to be checked off as completed.

New employees also have responsibilities in the induction process, and this should be made clear at the outset. They must conscientiously complete the induction evaluation form and provide useful informal feedback to the agency’s personnel staff and supervisor(s). If asked to serve on a joint employee-manager induction-planning team, all employees should feel obligated to provide as much assistance as possible (A joint induction-planning and review team comprised of both employees and managers is highly recommended from the standpoint of practicality and employee morale. The names and positions of this committee should be listed somewhere in the new employee orientation manual, with due credit given).
Training in Induction Skills

All supervisors with orientation responsibilities and agency administrators should participate in organized training sessions to develop orientation proficiency. When the buddy system is employed, these people should also receive training.

There are four basic approaches to orientation:

1.) **Verbal** – This sort of induction can be conducted individually or in small groups. Although time-consuming and expensive, it is best for feedback and promotes maximum understanding.

2.) **Written** – Its chief advantage is that of being a matter of record; continuing reference can thus be made to the material.

3.) **Audiovisual** – This sort of presentation combines both the verbal and written approaches and, once developed, can be used repeatedly if kept up-to-date.

4.) **Web-based** – This sort of presentation can employ a variety of technologies that include, but are not limited to, CD-ROM, videotapes, multimedia presentation software, World Wide Web (WWW), discussion forums, and the Internet. This approach can be expensive during its initial development, but can be quickly modified and has the ability to serve as a readily accessible reference for employees.

A tour of the facility is an especially worthwhile verbal device, even more so when it is followed by a question-and-answer period. And if the new job involves the use of unfamiliar equipment, a demonstration followed by supervised practice is recommended.

Another good approach is a slide-tape presentation with narrative, especially for treating important topics in a uniform manner for group orientation. Slide-tapes can be used to show overall and specific agency operations, introduce key members of the agency, review agency history and philosophy, explain compensation and benefit programs, and present safety and security guidelines. For maximum value, be sure to include a question-and-answer session after the presentation(s). And remember that because of its lower cost and higher adaptability to change, a slide-tape approach is preferable to a movie presentation.
Methods to Avoid

There are four common approaches to induction which should be avoided:

1.) **Emphasis on Paper Work** – This approach consists of a cursory welcome, with the real focus on employees’ completing paperwork required by the agency’s personnel staff. Then most of the orientation is handed over to the supervisor. Result: the new employee doesn’t feel any more a part of the agency than before.

2.) **Sketchy Outline of the Basics** – This is a rapid orientation, followed by the employee put to work immediately – to sink or swim.

3.) **Mickey Mouse Assignments** – Here the new employee is given a few insignificant duties to perform at first so that he or she can “learn how to do the job from the ground up.”

4.) **Suffocation** – This is a well-intentioned but disastrous approach in which the park and recreation agency gives the employee so much information so fast that the employee feels overwhelmed and suffocated.

The Orientation Kit

Every new employee should receive an employee induction kit or packet prepared by the agency’s personnel staff to supplement verbal orientation sessions. (Don’t forget brief introductory instructions on how to use the kit) Some materials a kit might include:

- An agency organization chart
- A projected agency organization chart
- Map of the facilities and park areas
- Key terms unique to the recreation field, agency and/or job
- Copy of policy handbook
- Copy of union contract (if appropriate)
- Copy of specific job goals and descriptions
- List of agency holidays
- List of fringe benefits
- Copies of performance evaluation forms, dates and procedures
Copies of other required forms (i.e., purchase orders, supply requisitions and expense reimbursements)
- List of on-the-job training opportunities
- Sources of information
- Detailed outline of emergency and accidental prevention procedures
- Sample copy of each important agency publication (i.e., activity guides, recent newsletters, etc.)
- Telephone/email numbers and locations of key personnel and operations
- Copies of insurance plans

The Word from Top Management

Achievement of agency goals will be furthered if one or more representatives of top management appear at group induction sessions and talk about the agency’s philosophy and expectations. These statements should spell out exactly what employees can expect from management and vice-versa. They can also be reinforced and made official policy when included in a prominent place in the employee handbook or orientation packet.

The Heart of Orientation

The topics selected to include in new employee orientation should be based on the needs of the agency and the employees. The park and recreation agency is interested in being productive, enhancing service quality and avoiding labor problems, while the employees need specific information in three areas:

1.) *Technical aspects of the job*
2.) *Agency standards, expectations, norms, traditions, policies, etc.*
3.) *Social behavior, such as approved conduct, the work climate, and getting to know fellow workers and supervisors.*

The first step is to identify essential agency and department-level
information. Sometimes, of course, the two levels of information will overlap. To help identify this information, your agency could:

- Examine other agencies’ employee manuals and orientation topics
- Survey current employees as to their information needs
- Confer with a personnel consultant or knowledgeable personnel administrators
- Study relevant books and articles

The following topics would appear to be agency-level information and thus the responsibility of the agency’s personnel staff:

1.) **Overview of the Agency**
   - Welcoming speech
   - Founding, growth, trends, goals, priorities and problems
   - Traditions, customs, norms and standards
   - Current specific functions of the agency
   - Services and residents served
   - Steps in getting product/service to potential customers
   - Scope of diversity of activities
   - Organization, structure, and relationship of agency and its departments
   - Organizational chain of command
   - Facts on key managerial staff
   - Community relations, expectations and activities
   - Web-based employee self-service program(s)

2.) **Key Policies and Procedures Review**

3.) **Compensation**
   - Pay rates and ranges
   - Overtime
   - Holiday pay
   - Shift differential (if applicable)
   - How pay is received
   - Deductions: required and optional, with specific amounts
Option to buy damaged products and costs thereof
- Discounts
- Advances on pay
- Loans from credit union(s)
- Reimbursement for job expenses
- Tax shelter options

4.) Fringe Benefits
- Insurance
- Medical-dental
- Life
- Disability
- Workers’ compensation
- Holidays and vacations (i.e., patriotic, religious, birthday)
- Leave, personal illness, family illness, bereavement, maternity, military, jury duty, emergency, extended absence
- Retirement plans and options
- Counseling services
- Cafeteria
- Recreation and social activities
- Other agency services to employees (i.e., facility memberships, program registration discounts, vehicle provision, fuel, etc.)

5.) Safety and Accident Prevention
- Completion of emergency data card (if not done as part of employment process)
- Health and first aid clinics
- Exercise and recreation facilities available
- Safety precautions & equipment
- Reporting of hazards
- Fire prevention and control
- Accident procedures and reporting
- OSHA requirements (review key sections)
- Physical exam requirements
6.) Employee and Union Relations

- Terms and conditions of employment review
- Assignment, reassignment and promotion
- Probationary period and expected on-the-job conduct
- Reporting of sickness and lateness to work
- Employee rights and responsibilities
- Manager and supervisor rights
- Relations with supervisors and shop stewards
- Employee organizations and options
- Union contract provisions and/or agency policy
- Supervision and evaluation of performance
- Discipline and reprimands
- Grievance procedures
- Termination of employment (resignation, layoff, discharge, retirement)
- Content and examination of personnel record
- Communications: channels of communication upward and downward, suggestion system, posting materials on bulletin board, sharing new ideas
- Sanitation and cleanliness
- Wearing of safety equipment, badges and uniforms
- Bringing things on and removing things from agency grounds
- On-site political activity
- Gambling
- Handling of rumors

7.) Physical Facilities

- Tour of facilities
- Food services and cafeteria
- Restricted areas for eating, smoking, chewing, etc.
- Employee entrances
- Restricted areas (i.e., cars)
Parking
First aid
Restrooms
Supplies and equipment

8.) Economic Factors
- Costs of damage by select items with required sales to balance
- Costs of theft with required sales to compensate
- Profit margins (if applicable)
- Labor costs
- Cost of equipment
- Costs of absenteeism, lateness and accidents

The content of departmental and job induction will naturally vary from department to department and from job to job within the park and recreation agency. However, these topics are commonly covered by supervisors:

1.) Department Functions
- Goals and current priorities
- Organization and structure
- Operational activities
- Relationship of functions to other departments
- Relationships of jobs within the department

2.) Job Duties and Responsibilities
- Detailed explanation of job based on current job description and expected results
- Explanation of why the job is important, how the specific job relates to others in the department and agency
- Discussion of common problems and how to avoid and overcome them
- Performance standards and basis of performance evaluation
- Number of daily work hours and times
- Overtime needs and requirements
- Extra duty assignments (i.e., changing duties to cover for an absent worker)
3.) Policies, Procedures, Rules and Regulations

- Rules unique to the job and/or department
- Handling emergencies
- Safety precautions and accident prevention
- Reporting of hazards and accidents
- Cleanliness standards and sanitation (i.e., clean up requirements)
- Security, theft problems and costs
- Relations with external public
- Eating, smoking and chewing gum, etc., in departmental area
- Removal of things from department
- Damage control (i.e., smoking restrictions)
- Time clock and time sheets
- Breaks/rest periods
- Lunch duration and time
- Making and receiving personal telephone calls
- Copying privileges
- Personal computer use (i.e., surfing web, printing photos, etc.)
- Requisitioning supplies and equipment
- Monitoring and evaluating of employee performance
- Job bidding and requesting reassignment
- Going to cars during work hours

4.) Tour of Department

- Restrooms and showers
- Fire-alarm box and fire extinguisher stations
- AED location(s)
- Time clocks
5.) Introduction to Department Employees

Induction Follow-Up

Formal and systematic follow-up to the initial orientation is a must. Don’t just invite the new employees to “come see me sometime if you have any questions.” An open-door policy is no guarantee that new employees will feel free to initiate discussion with you. It is crucial to avoid the sink-or-swim approach of abruptly ignoring the new person following induction.

Try to arrange for follow-up by both the agency’s personnel staff and the supervisors. For example, the supervisor might check on the new employee after one day on the job and then again after one week. Next, personnel staff can follow-up after the employee has been there for a month.

Remember that the check lists of subjects to be covered by the agency’s personnel staff and the immediate supervisor should be studied to assure that all items were covered. The completed check lists should then be signed by the personnel representative and supervisor conducting orientation, as well as by the new employee. This attests to the fact that orientation was completed before the check lists are filed in the new employee’s personnel file.
The Final Stage: Evaluation

Although there should be a continuous monitoring of the induction system throughout the year, there should also be an official and comprehensive year-end evaluation of the total process and its components, conducted by the agency’s personnel staff, with help from the supervisors. The purpose of this evaluation is to ascertain orientation’s current effectiveness in meeting its goal and to determine methods for future improvement.

The best way to gauge the system’s success is through feedback from new employees. Feedback can be secured in these ways:

- Unsigned questionnaires completed by all new employees
- In-depth interview of randomly selected new employees or representatives of different departments
- Free-wheeling group discussion sessions of new employees who have had the opportunity to settle comfortably into their jobs

Figures 1 & 2 are further guidelines to consider when evaluating and improving your employee orientation system.
Figure 1. Ten Characteristics of Successful Induction Programs

Ten results characterize an effective orientation program. If your induction program has been successful, the results should be:

1.) Feeling of security in the new employee
2.) Opportunity to meet top-level management, supervisory staff, and fellow workers
3.) Basic understanding of the agency: history, mission, vision, goals, services, products, organization and employee services
4.) Knowledge of help available to get the job done
5.) Information on supplies, resources and equipment available and how to secure them
6.) Familiarization with basic job duties and responsibilities, how the job relates to other jobs, and supervisors’ performance standards and expectations
7.) Clear understanding of terms of employment and working conditions
8.) Information on opportunities for on-the-job training and advancement
9.) Understanding of community and customers served
10.) Understanding of agency policy, rules, regulations, traditions, and ways of doing things
Figure 2. Sixteen Cautions to Observe

1.) Be sure to tailor your induction topics and procedures to fit your agency
2.) Be certain to fix induction responsibilities and to assure they are understood by all concerned
3.) Don’t rely strictly on managers and supervisors to plan the induction program – do include a cross-section of employees
4.) Keep an induction file containing: programs of other agencies, new ideas, informal employee feedback and completed evaluation forms
5.) Avoid overwhelming employees with too much information too fast
6.) Anticipate employees’ potential problems and needs for information – be proactive as well as reactive
7.) Identify both agency and job-level induction needs, and organize these by personnel staff and supervisors respectively
8.) Use a check list system for topics to be discussed by the personnel staff and supervisory crew to assure all pertinent topics are covered
9.) Insist that each new employee sign both the check lists as proof that he or she has received the induction materials and reviewed the check list topics
10.) Share the most important information both in writing and verbally – don’t rely solely on the written word
11.) Use a loose-leaf notebook rather than a bound employee manual to permit constant and easy updating
12.) Be sure to show how the employee’s job is related to other jobs and how his or her duties affect the final result
13.) Spell out clearly job expectations, work responsibilities, goals, performance standards and criteria, and acceptable conduct at work, with a liberal amount of time for questions and discussion
14.) When selecting a “buddy” to assist the supervisor’s orientation, be sure he or she is an effective, well-informed worker with positive attitudes toward work, the job, the department and the agency
15.) Seek ongoing new employee feedback, conduct a formal annual evaluation of the induction program, and revise the program accordingly
16.) Include the spouse at one session to secure family understanding of and commitment to the job and agency