

Build Canada Exchange: Hosting a Participant



Purpose

As **Build Canada Exchange (BCE)** participants enter the public service for their assignments, it is important for host organizations to prepare and offer supports to these new entrants. BCE participants may range in their familiarity with the federal public service, and will need time and supports to adapt to the new and unique context. This brief guide highlights recommended practices for public servants preparing to host an incoming BCE participant.

This list of recommended practices was developed through conversations with individuals who entered the public service from the private sector. Topics were broad in range and included: challenges associated with onboarding, the unique government context and decision-making structures, ways to optimize their impact and the sharing of their expertise, timing and cycles, effective methods of communication, and support networks.

The insights included in this brief guide are recommended for consideration to support a more impactful assignment, for both the BCE participant and their host organization.

Key terms

BCE participant: individual on assignment in the public service.

BCE host / Host manager: designated public servant(s) supporting the BCE participant in their assignment. BCE host(s) could include the person the BCE participant reports to (e.g., supervisor) and/or an individual tasked to support the BCE participant's experience and knowledge transfer (e.g., analyst/officer).



Job aid: TRN4-J55



Canada School
of Public Service

École de la fonction
publique du Canada

Canada

Recommendations

Outlined below are recommended practices that can support more effective BCE assignments. Each recommended practice is rooted in insights and challenges highlighted by public servants who entered from the private sector.

1. Recommendation: Regular check-ins

Hold check-in meetings between the BCE participant and those at the management level at the start of and throughout the assignment. These conversations should provide participants with opportunities to showcase the extensive knowledge and expertise they bring from outside government, while enabling host managers and teams to actively position and champion this incoming talent across the organization.

- Check-ins should also serve as a space for BCE participants to ask questions, provide feedback and discuss potential changes to the assignment scope, and share observations that could contribute to organizational improvements.



Related challenges:

- A need to enhance knowledge of BCE participants' expertise, skills, and experience among management. Missed opportunities to be given latitude beyond their defined role, so they could offer even more value to the organization.
- Desire for more opportunities to discuss challenges and raise questions to those at the management level early on and on an ongoing basis. Hesitation to keep advocating for change and new approaches when feedback is only asked for early on.

2. Recommendation: Provide information on 'how government works'

Provide BCE participants with targeted onboarding material and early learning opportunities to build their understanding of the government context (e.g., authorities, decision-making structures and processes, organizational mandate and structure, government priorities, resourcing rules and processes).



Related challenges:

- Individuals noted that foundational knowledge early on would have been useful to navigate the public sector context more effectively, accelerate their transition into the organization, and help them understand how their work contributes to broader government priorities.

3. Recommendation: Provide guidance on organizational structures and hierarchies

Giving participants guidance about the reasoning behind the different structures and hierarchies would help to support how they communicate with others (e.g., where they and their team fit in the organizational structures; who reports to whom and why; implications of classification and collective agreements).



Related challenges:

- Lack of familiarity with government and public service structures and stratifications, and how best to communicate to and 'unlock' the different levels. It takes time to adjust to a different organizational scale.

Recommendations (cont.)

4. Recommendation: Highlight unique operating context considerations

In addition to the structure and process dynamics that are common across various parts of government, each organization and team may have unique cultural and operating norms as well (e.g., risk tolerance, meeting rhythms, accountability).



Related challenges:

- In some cases, expectations related to work dynamics (e.g., deadlines, progress tracking, accountability), did not align with previous experiences.
- The rhythm of meetings (e.g., often quite dense) may differ from prior experiences outside of government; and reduces the time set aside for more strategic and creative thinking.
- Participants may also need to consider that risk tolerance can vary depending on the unique chain of command and organizational mandate.

5. Recommendation: Create psychological safety around asking questions

Provide explicit and consistent assurances that asking questions is encouraged at the start and throughout their assignment.



Related challenges:

- Self-consciousness about lacking knowledge of topics that might seem basic to experienced public servants (e.g., section 32; P6). There is a steep and layered learning curve to onboarding as an executive to the public service.

6. Recommendation: Mentorship and supportive networks

Facilitate opportunities for participants to receive mentorship from peers who are established public servants, and those in a more senior position. In addition, BCE participants can also benefit from sharing insights with fellow BCE participants, as they may face similar questions and challenges in their cohort.



Related challenges:

- Written resources alone are not sufficient for understanding how to navigate government processes. Desire for opportunities to speak with peers (or a mentor who is not in their direct chain of command) to receive guidance and ask questions.

Recommendations (cont.)

7. Recommendation: Clarify goals and expectations

Host managers should help create avenues for BCE participants to establish clear goals and expectations early on in their assignment, while also providing context on the unique realities and complexities of working within the government. Participants should be aware of the complex networks of processes, approvals and stakeholders they may encounter in their role, as well as understand the various concurrent cycles in play (e.g., financial and Parliamentary cycles).

Sharing this context with BCE participants early on will help individuals set realistic expectations, plan work effectively, and better understand how timelines and outcomes are shaped in the public sector.



Related challenges:

- Participants were taken by surprise by the sudden storm of deadlines that happen at certain periods of the financial cycle and other priorities that are unique to the government context.
- In addition, as individuals navigated government processes, the complexities and pace of decision-making and implementation contrasted with their prior experiences outside the public sector.

8. Recommendation: Create opportunities for early successes

The assignment and role of the BCE participant should be shaped in a way to provide opportunities to contribute to concrete successes during their time in government, rather than only contributing to longer-term projects.



Related challenges:

- Given some of the longer timelines in the public service, there can be a lack of clarity if contributions are having any impact. Inability to point to some successes can contribute to lower morale.

9. Recommendation: Discuss project management expectations and experience

Host managers should become familiar with the BCE participant's expectations for and experience in project management (or managing initiatives). This will help to both clarify how their experience may differ from the public service context, and identify new practices and perspectives that the BCE participant may be able to offer.



Related challenges:

- Expectations for project management may not align with the public sector context (e.g., shared accountability, more steps). Desire to share innovative project management practices that could contribute value and efficiency.