



Public Service Commission Commission de la fonction publique
of Canada du Canada

CAP ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

A PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS



**BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGERS
AND PARTICIPANTS**

Canada 

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Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the Accelerated Executive Development Program (AEXDP) for allowing the Career Assignment Program (CAP) to draw upon their original document entitled Maximizing Developmental Assignments - A Guide For Managers and Participants, June 1999, in the development of this CAP Assignment Guide.

Published on behalf of the Career Assignment Program; PSC, by Flinriver Publishing.

Layout and Design: Evans James Ltd.

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**BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGERS
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1 INTRODUCTION



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Purpose of this Guide

Past experience with the Career Assignment Program (CAP) assignment process has clearly demonstrated that *a successful CAP assignment depends upon successfully managing relationships* with managers, colleagues and staff. The partnership concept in learning is also very relevant in the context of a continuous learning organization. A collaborative approach along with shared responsibilities will ensure the success of all partners.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- help participants through the integration process in their new assignments; and,
- encourage managers to become involved with participants as learning partners.

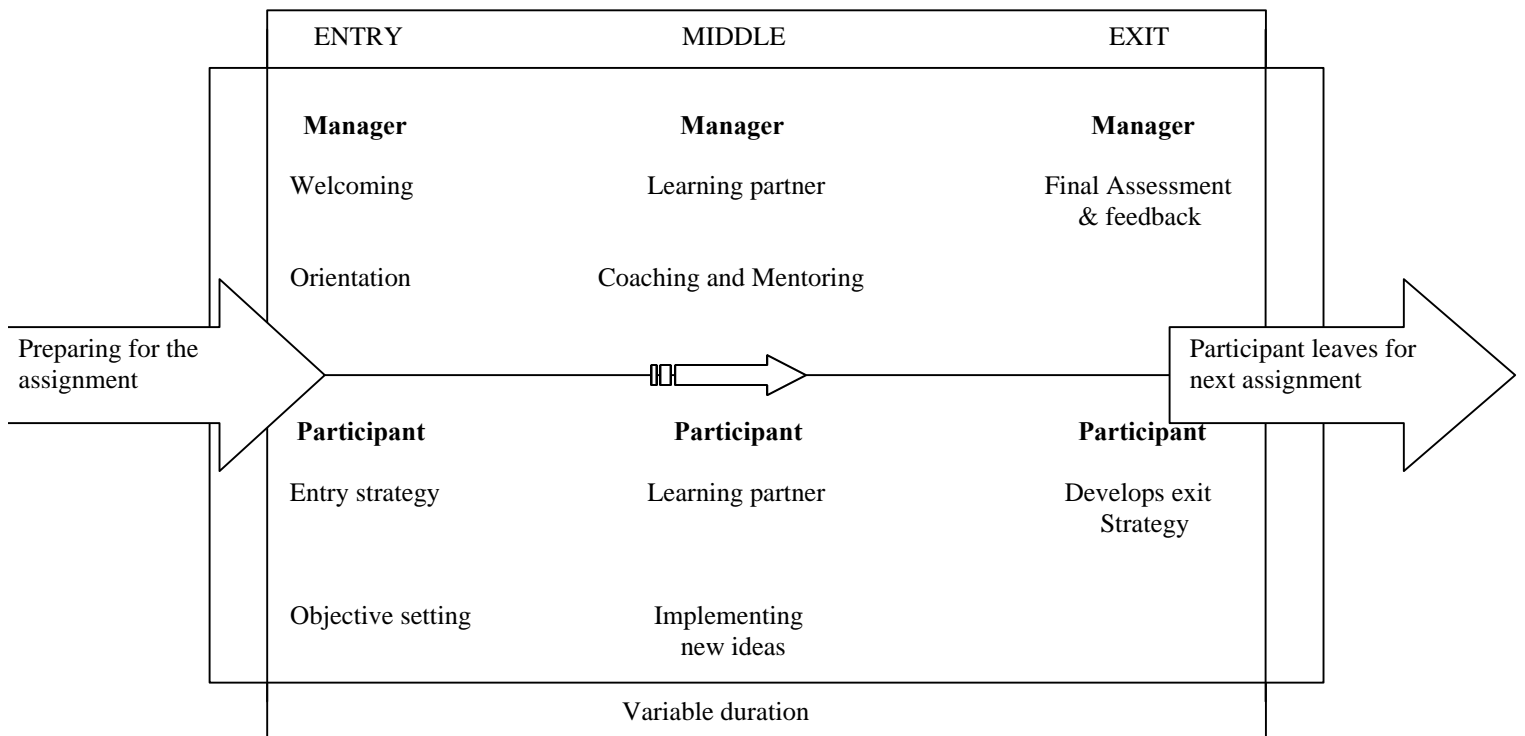
How to use this guide

Following the introductory sections on: the Role of Assignments, and Some Common Challenges Posed by Assignments, the remainder of this guide is divided into two sections for: (1) Managers, and (2) Participants. It is recommended that both of these sections are reviewed so that managers will be aware of the issues and assumptions with which participants are working; and participants will know what they can expect from their managers, and be aware of their manager's expectations.

The Assignment Phases

The following illustration (page 6) identifies the main phases of an assignment, as they are presented in this guide. The information is categorized by the "phase" of the assignment. We have learned that the most useful way to describe the phases of a CAP assignment is the same as how one might describe the elements of a good story: it has a beginning (entry), a middle, and an end (exit).

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The Role of Assignments

The developmental assignment is a central component of the Career Assignment Program (CAP). During the developmental assignment, participants are given the opportunity to act individually and collectively, and to reflect and learn from others. Also, they are given an opportunity to lead and act as a role model.

Developmental assignments are the participants' anchor for action, reflection and learning. In this way, their work experiences are a source of continuous learning, providing them with an opportunity to conciliate theory and practice, and to draw learnings from observation, appreciation and through openness.

Moreover, the developmental assignment is the reference point from which all other learning tools offered by CAP - personalized learning plans, coaching, networking events, a six week educational component at the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) - can be integrated and made relevant to the learning objectives of the participant.

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Developmental assignments take many forms, but all should offer participants the opportunity to diversify their experience through the range of core functions, (line operations, policy development, central agency, regional operations, corporate services, political exposure) to meet their personal development plan objectives, and to strengthen their personal management competencies or leadership capabilities.

It is anticipated that most assignments will have an approximate duration of twelve months. The actual duration is determined in consultation with the participant, the manager and the CAP Office Career Development Advisor of the Public Service Commission.

Some Common Challenges posed by Assignments

Stretch assignments are demanding, often presenting participants with extraordinary circumstances and challenges. The culture, issues, systems, language and jargon can be quite different in their new organization. Moreover, participants might need to temporarily relocate, experiencing a very personal separation from their family and community.

At the same time, participants are asked to meet high performance expectations while on a steep learning curve. They must absorb new knowledge and practice new skills from the onset. Participants sometimes meet with resistance from their new colleagues if their presence is perceived to have been “imposed” into the organization or agency.

On top of these demands, participants are asked to participate in collective learning events, etc. offered at various times by the PSC CAP office or CCMD.

It’s no wonder, then, that both participants and managers often have many questions when embarking on this partnership. The following presents a discussion of some of the questions and best practices to support participants and managers throughout the various stages of an assignment.



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Preparing for the Assignment

By the time managers are bringing a CAP participant into an assignment, they have spent some time thinking about the competencies that are required to fulfill the organizational requirements. Managers must have made a commitment to the learning objectives of CAP and to the success of the participant, and be prepared to enter a relationship with a participant as a learning partner.

Managers often have the following questions on their mind as they bring a CAP participant into an assignment in their organization:

- How can I ensure that both the participant's learning needs and my organizational requirements are met in this assignment?
- How can I help the participant integrate with my staff, and how can I help his/her new colleagues adjust to his/her presence?
- How can I reward *all* my staff who have helped the participant succeed?
- What exit strategies will allow the participant and my staff to continue to their next challenges with grace and dignity?

Once you have decided to become a host manager, there are a number of best practices that will help you create a positive environment for the CAP participant's learning experience in your organization.

Managers' Best Practices

- ✓ You are clear and realistic about the objectives of the assignment and communicate them at the very beginning.
- ✓ You are frank about your organization's requirements, the nature of the issues the participant will be working with, and the cultural context within which they will be operating.
- ✓ You are concerned about how a CAP participant will "fit" with their team. Ideally, you would want your team members to share responsibility for the success of the participant's assignment.

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- ✓ You ensure that the “offer / response” cycle turns around quickly when an offer is made. Since, likely, several CAP participants will be interviewed for an assignment, the “offer / response” cycle must turn around quickly so that other candidates can either be considered by the manager, or informed directly by the manager that the assignment has been offered to someone else.

Entry Phase

Participant Arrival and Orientation

The first days of a CAP participant’s assignment are critical to setting the stage for a successful experience. As a manager, there will be some preparation required to facilitate the integration of the participant into the new working environment.

Managers’ Best Practices

- ✓ Your organization is well briefed about CAP and the assignment.
- ✓ The arrival of the participant is expected by staff. Ideally, colleagues and staff have been consulted/informed about the decision to offer an assignment to a participant.
- ✓ You set the context and tone for staff; ie. balance “we have decided to provide a learning/development opportunity to a CAP participant” message with the need to integrate the participant quickly into the rhythm and culture of the organization.
- ✓ You set the arrival date and allot time to formally welcome the participant on that day.
- ✓ You ensure the participant receives an orientation session.
- ✓ You provide the participant with a briefing package on the organization, including its structure, key names and phone numbers, a list of key colleagues, stakeholders and partners, with a description of their roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ You brief participants on the issues and challenges within their area of responsibility.

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- ✓ You arrange for the participant to spend ½ hour with the Director General and/or Assistant Deputy Minister within their first week on the job. The participant is considered a part of the management team.
- ✓ Informatics systems are up and running, including Intranet and Internet access, etc. Training is provided on how to use these systems since there are differences among the informatics systems used by government organizations.
- ✓ You meet weekly for ½ hour (or more if required) for the first two months of the assignment to help build the manager/participant relationship and establish patterns for asking questions and checking perceptions.
- ✓ You present the big picture, and set overall priorities including, in specific terms, the expected contribution to the organization.
- ✓ You outline your expectations and provide direction on where to start, identifying first priorities.
- ✓ You identify the principal competencies and substantive knowledge required by the organization in the assignment.
- ✓ If the position is a staff or special project role, you ensure that the participant has administrative support.
- ✓ You provide on-going support, advice and encouragement to facilitate integration into the organization.
- ✓ You meet with the participant to discuss their developmental needs and to look for opportunities for the participant to pursue their learning objectives (eg. through special opportunities/challenges).
- ✓ In conjunction with the participant, you develop the document “*Assignment & Review Plan*”, ensuring that assignment and participant objectives are integrated with performance goals; it is suggested that the objectives be reviewed and discussed with the CAP PSC Career Development Advisor.
- ✓ In the early months, you keep watch for potential difficulties and alert the participant - a quick word of warning makes all the difference.

Middle Phase

During the middle phase, the learning partnership and trust between the manager and participant should be well developed. The manager should be positioned to lead the participant towards objectives that challenge the limits previously ascribed by the participant.

The manager and participant need to, in essence, build a mutually beneficial or “symbiotic” relationship with each other. This relationship is critical to the success of the stretch assignment for both the participant and for the organization.

Managers’ Best Practices

- ✓ You meet regularly with the participant to “tune up” commitments so that they reflect changing participant and organizational requirements. This ongoing communication is critical to deepening the assignment and learning experience for both the host organization and the participant; it is further recommended to include at these meetings the PSC CAP Career Development Advisor on an occasional or as needed basis.
- ✓ You provide guidance and support.
- ✓ You encourage and enable participation in all formal CAP learning activities.
- ✓ You direct the CAP participant to other formal learning opportunities related to the assignment and encourage the participant to attend.
- ✓ As your knowledge of the participant’s strengths and weaknesses develop, you lead the participant into circumstances that stretch them beyond the objectives outlined in the Assignment & Review Plan.
- ✓ You place a high priority on communicating with the participant frequently to provide constructive feedback and support, discuss challenges, adjust objectives (as required).
- ✓ You foster a climate that promotes risk taking and tolerates mistakes.

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- ✓ You encourage the participant to be a change agent in the organization.
- ✓ You welcome ideas from other work experiences (for example a client service check list, best practices).
- ✓ You play a part in orienting participants to the organizational culture.

Exit Phase

As the CAP participant prepares to leave your organization, your verbal and written feedback is a key part of the participant's learning experience. Acknowledging the contributions your staff members have made is also important at this point.

Managers' Best Practices

- ✓ You allow for flexibility with respect to the termination date of the current assignment, when appropriate; furthermore, as indicated in the assignment agreement, allow time to search for the next assignment.
- ✓ You convene a formal interview with the participant.
- ✓ Your performance assessment for the participant considers progress on objectives as set out in the assignment agreement, and as these objectives evolved throughout the assignment.
- ✓ More important, the performance assessment considers how the participant has contributed to the organization as a leader - perhaps as a change agent. You understand that a CAP participant's contribution rests more in their ability to shape progress than it does in their ability to gain content expertise related to the files they are managing.
- ✓ You review accomplishments and contributions - what went well.
- ✓ You identify competencies that were strengthened over the course of the assignment.
- ✓ You indicate competencies that could not be assessed and those that still require improvement.
- ✓ You reward remaining staff.
- ✓ You prepare the final Assignment/Review plan, with performance rating.



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Preparing for the assignment

Prior to thinking about a specific assignment, participants will have formulated their development plan and started to define their expectations for their upcoming assignment.

Participants often have these questions on their mind as they begin an assignment in a new organization:

- What mechanisms can I use to learn about the new organization (the culture, key stakeholders, colleagues, partners and programs) and who in the organization can help me accelerate this learning?
- What financial, environmental and human resources will be available to help me?
- Will my new colleagues and staff be open to a “newcomer” being parachuted into their organization? How can I ensure that they are open? How can I build my credibility and gain their trust?
- To what extent will the host organization accept to invest in my development? How can I persuade my home and/or host organization to invest in my development?
- What are their expectations regarding my performance?
- Will I measure up and perform in a fully satisfactory manner within the short time-frame of the assignment? Will I be qualified enough?
- How will I balance my personal life with my professional commitments?
- If I am temporarily relocated from my home, what support can I expect to receive and how can I ensure that I will receive it?
- What is the organization’s level of tolerance for errors?

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Integration into a new team represents a challenge in a new assignment: acquainting yourself with your new partners, identifying the key people and the most efficient networks, identifying where or in what position is the real power of influence, etc. In other words, you must develop (in a very short period) your strategy, in terms of organizational savvy, to be in a position to have a certain influence on the new organization while at the same time fostering trust and maintaining your credibility. The following best practices presented in this guide are intended to provide you with some support as you begin to address all of these questions.

Entry Phase

Your attitude and approach to each assignment will play an important part in how you are received in an organization, and how much you will be able to capitalize upon the opportunities provided by your assignment. Adaptability, flexibility and humility are all great assets when starting an assignment.

Participants' Best Practices

- ✓ You are clear about the learning objectives you seek to achieve within the context of a developmental assignment. This is accomplished largely through the development of a personal learning plan, with your Career Development Advisor.
- ✓ You introduce yourself, you ask questions, and request briefings from colleagues and superiors.
- ✓ You show you are interested in the new organization; you avoid talking about your old organization and how it did things.
- ✓ You take advantage of all opportunities offered.
- ✓ You learn as much as possible about the new organization (review of annual reports, vision/mission statements, etc.).
- ✓ You identify reasonable accomplishments for your assignment.
- ✓ You identify the management competencies that require strengthening, you differentiate between those that can be worked on in context of the assignment and those that will require other learning opportunities.

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- ✓ You recognize that the assignment is a learning opportunity. You enter the organization not as an expert, but as someone who has a great deal to contribute.
- ✓ Within the first six weeks into the assignment, you outline, with your assignment manager, the document entitled “*Assignment and Review Plan*”, determining your assignment and objectives; it is suggested that the objectives be reviewed and discussed with the PSC CAP Career Development Advisor.
- ✓ You educate your colleagues, peers and staff about the CAP program and its’ purpose and act as an ambassador for CAP.

Middle Phase

During the middle phase, the learning partnership and trust between the manager and participant should be well developed. The manager and participant need to, in essence, build a mutually beneficial or “symbiotic” relationship with each other. This relationship is critical to the success of the stretch assignment for both the participant and for the organization. Participants are positioned to act as agents of change within the organization.

Participants’ Best Practices

- ✓ You target pertinent learning objectives, based on your Personal Learning Plan.
- ✓ You foster communication with your manager, colleagues, and staff.
- ✓ You have ongoing dialogue with your manager regarding your performance and assignment objectives.
- ✓ You communicate your needs, (training needs or other), and identify relevant learning opportunities.
- ✓ You have regular meetings with your Career Development Advisor and you stay in contact with your departmental Liaison Officer and home organization.
- ✓ You stay committed to high performance delivery and learning.
- ✓ You stay on track by balancing your professional and personal life.

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- ✓ You propose suggestions for the development of staff, and encourage the development of personal learning plans and follow-through.

Exit Phase

For the participant, this phase is characterized by the search for a next assignment, and often, a sense of sadness about leaving, especially as they find themselves just beginning to “hit their stride” in the assignment.

Participants’ Best Practices

- ✓ You recognize that finding a new assignment takes time; you start looking for a new assignment before the end of the current assignment. You contact your Career Development Advisor at least 3 months before exiting to plan your next assignment.
- ✓ You update your CAP résumé for marketing purposes.
- ✓ You make sure that a formal interview is convened with your current assignment manager.
- ✓ You take the time to say goodbye to, and to acknowledge the contributions of colleagues and staff. You are now a part of their network as they are of yours.
- ✓ You find the opportunity to formally thank and say goodbye to the organization and those that helped you throughout your assignment.
- ✓ You have shared your learning with the organization on an ongoing basis. This has allowed you to contribute more fully to the organization, and to enhance the organization’s ability to respond to your departure.
- ✓ You describe to your manager the positive aspects of the assignment (i.e. work, people), what was really helpful.
- ✓ You describe the difficulties, especially those that were unanticipated and seemingly out of your control.

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- ✓ You identify what made the assignment particularly useful for you as a CAP participant; suggesting whether the same assignment could be used for another CAP participant.
- ✓ You ask for advice on what to do differently next time.
- ✓ You share your learning with the organization.
- ✓ You ensure that the manager completes the Assessment portion of the Assignment Plan and Review document.
- ✓ You review your CAP Personal Learning Plan and Development Plan in light of the experience acquired during your assignment.



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4 GLOSSARY



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GLOSSARY

CAP – Career Assignment Program

Career Development Advisor – The Public Service Commission CAP Office Officer assigned to support you through the CAP program

Host manager – a manager who receives a CAP participant on assignment in their department or agency

Host organization – the department or agency which receives a CAP participant for an assignment in their organization

Integration – the transition of a CAP participant into their new assignment

Participant - the individual who is currently enrolled in the CAP program

PSC – Public Service Commission

Stretch assignment – an assignment that provides CAP participants with learning opportunities in functions or areas beyond the candidate's past experiences and current level of competency; these assignments may be in other parts of the organization, or in other organizations altogether