



# BEST PRACTICES FOR REMOTE WORK AT NRCAN



*A tool to share ideas, suggestions and best practices for managers and employees on remote work.*

# How to use this tool

While working as a team in a remote environment has its challenges, it can still be an environment conducive to building strong working relationships, facilitating communication and creating a sense of belonging.

With this in mind, managers should have an open discussion with their employees about the topics outlined in this guide to choose the different strategies that best meet the needs of the team depending on environment, nature of the work, and individuals of the team.



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## Trust

- **Trust is essential** and takes time to develop. It begins with getting to know your colleagues and employees. Take the time to listen to them, and let them get to know who you are as well. Share relatable past work experiences, or even stories outside of the work environment to allow employees to connect with you both in and out of the workplace.
- **Create a welcoming environment** and open relationship with staff and colleagues where they are comfortable discussing concerns and issues. Helpful responses to their concerns can help establish this type of environment.
- **Be open and transparent** about your own challenges of working remotely to help connect with your coworkers.

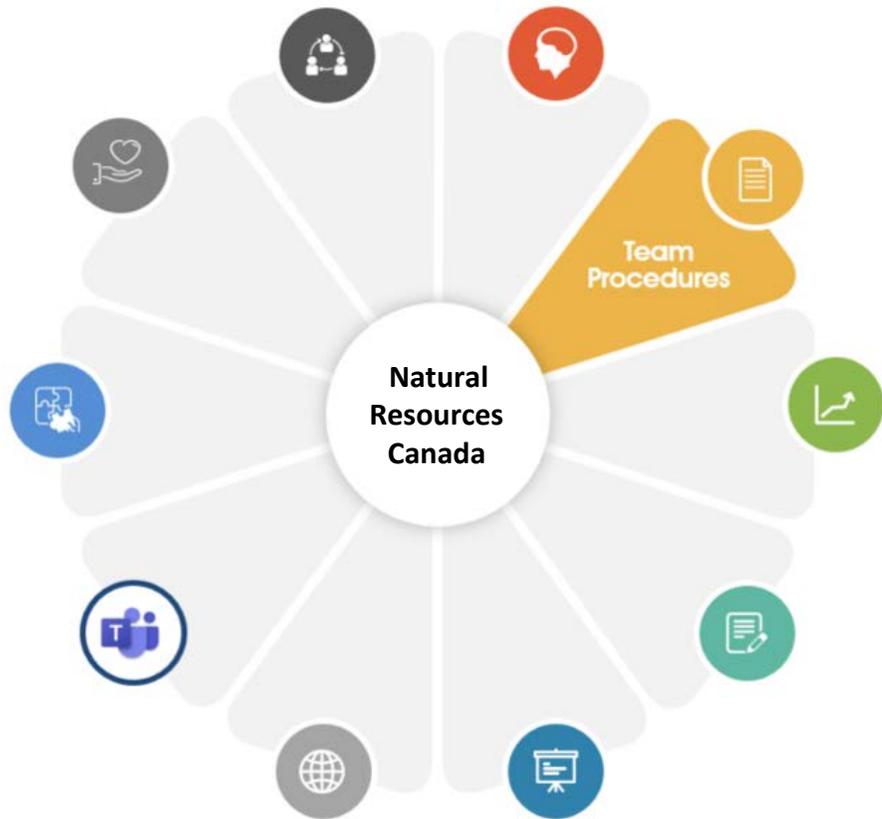
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## Clear expectations

- **Setting up for success**
  - ✓ Establish a daily routine with set start and end times.
  - ✓ Include breaks in your calendar such as scheduled times to eat, time to rest your eyes between meetings, or time to get outside for fresh air.
  - ✓ Plan time to connect with staff and colleagues.
- **Support employees by planning for their productivity**
  - ✓ For example, junior employees may benefit from individualized work plans as they adjust to working more independently, while high performers may feel more pressure to deliver and could find themselves working longer hours.
- **Establish Expectations. Flexibility is important.**
  - ✓ It is important that everyone understands what is expected and what the “non-negotiables” and “negotiables” are. Ensure it is clear that employees must seek **approval in advance** for overtime and changes to their regular work schedule (within core hours) or telework location.

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## Remote Team Procedures

Have a team discussion on working remotely. Come to an agreement about how the team can work best together.

- **Check-in and out**
  - ✓ Is it necessary? if so, what is the best way to do that?
- **Team meetings**
  - ✓ Establish frequency, duration, tools required (ie. Teams, Zoom, GoC teleconferencing system, etc.)
- **Connecting and Communicating**
  - ✓ Identify ways for you and for team members to stay in touch (ie. Text, email, phone call, etc.)
- **Make time for informal exchanges**
  - ✓ For example, host a virtual lunch hour
- **Information sharing**
  - ✓ What method(s) work best for the team?
- **Silent hours**
  - ✓ Clearly identify a time when employees are not expected to respond.
- **Utilize your calendar**
  - ✓ Block off time for uninterrupted work, establish a meeting-free day with your team, and block breaks and lunchtime.

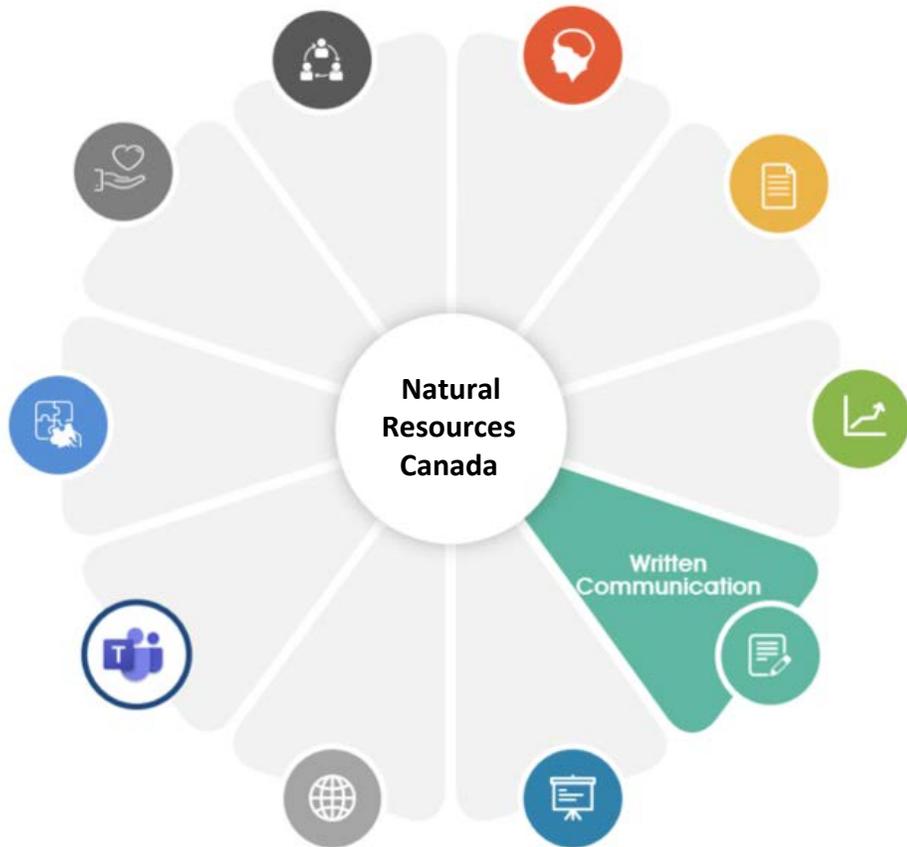
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## Performance Management

- Meaningful work with an understanding of how it contributes to the priorities of the team, branch, sector and department will have **positive** effects on employee engagement and satisfaction.
  - ✓ **Be clear on work objectives and provide feedback often.** Clarify priorities and timelines; plan for regular bilats to discuss work updates.
  - ✓ If you are an employee, **ensure you understand** what work is required of you by clarifying work objectives with your manager. The right tools, training, and support should be available to you to meet the established performance objectives.
  - ✓ Talk about **core competencies**: what do these look like in a remote work environment and how to effectively with others for example.
  - ✓ **Measure results** and outcomes: what worked well and what could be improved?
- Performance and presentism are not the same. Performance is an ongoing process which involves planning, coaching, feedback, assessment and recognition.
- *Keep in mind*: a big source of stress and conflict amongst staff is ambiguity and lack of clarity on their roles and responsibilities. Make sure that everyone understands their role and how they should collaborate with others in and outside of the team.

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## Written Communication

In a remote work environment, we rely heavily on written communications. Before sending an email or any written message, consider the following:

- **What is your intention?** Often, a 15 minute conversation can avoid lost time with email exchanges. A summary of the conversation can be captured in writing and sent to all parties afterward.
- **Is my intention clear?** Beginning an email by stating what you are looking for may also help avoid the back and forth e-mail exchange.
- **Should I write in both languages?** If you are seeking feedback or more information from a few people, using both languages is a good idea. It shows **inclusion** and invites responders to use the language of their choice. If you are responding to a client or an employee, you must use the language of their choice.
- **What else should I consider?** Different people could interpret the same message in various ways.
  - ✓ Be mindful of **tone** and **vocabulary** by ensuring it is respectful and appropriate for work.
  - ✓ Use **neutral pronouns** as often as possible (see examples [here](#).)
  - ✓ Messages should start with a **salutation** and **end with a thank you**.

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## Meetings

- **Meeting Styles.** Hold your meetings on videoconference when possible, but for one-on-one chats, consider a phone conversation to give yourself a break from the screen.
- **Start informally.** Reserve the first few minutes of your meeting for informal chat, giving time for people to be “late”, especially those in back-to-back meetings needing a few minutes.
- **Share meeting materials in advance**, when possible.
- **Meeting overview.** Start your meetings by explaining the meeting proceedings, and introduce newcomers.
- **Avoid talking for an extended period of time.** Stop regularly and open up the “room” for questions or comments.
- **Be mindful of Official Languages.** If you chair a meeting, you have responsibilities to ensure participants can use the Official Language of their choice and that information is shared in both languages.
- **Accessibility Requirements.** Consider all participants and ensure platforms can accommodate everyone in the audience.
- **Take breaks.** If the meeting is longer than 2 hours, plan for a short break halfway for everyone.
- **Avoid multitasking!** Being present in a meeting and actively listening is a sign of respect and engagement – much like if you were in a face-to-face meeting.
- **Inform colleagues if you are not visible.** If you must turn your camera off, let the participants know.
- **Maintain Professionalism.** Attire, gestures and behaviours must be appropriate for work.

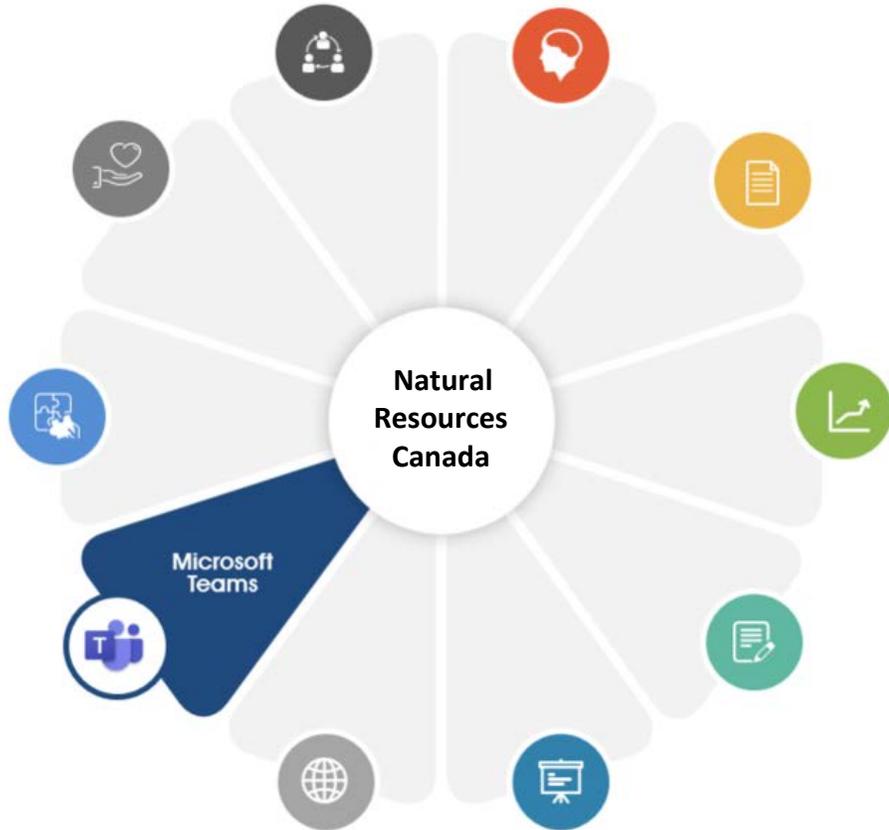
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## Staying Connected

- **Be proactive.**
  - ✓ Reach out to staff and co-workers to understand how they are doing, and what their challenges and needs are.
- **Touch base.**
  - ✓ Establish regular communication with remote employees and identify ways in which they can connect as a team.
- **Be on the same page.**
  - ✓ Use instant messaging tools like Microsoft Teams to keep track of daily priorities and updates. Try to save email correspondence for business communication and record keeping.
- **Be flexible.**
  - ✓ Proactively raise the notion of flexibility at team meetings and employee bilats.
- **Be transparent.**
  - ✓ Have honest conversations about what is working for the team, and what requires improvement or change. Welcome collaboration from the entire team for solutions.
- **Be responsible.**
  - ✓ We all play a key role in staying connected. If you are a manager, checking in on staff is your responsibility!

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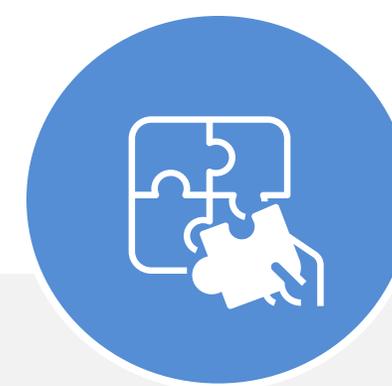
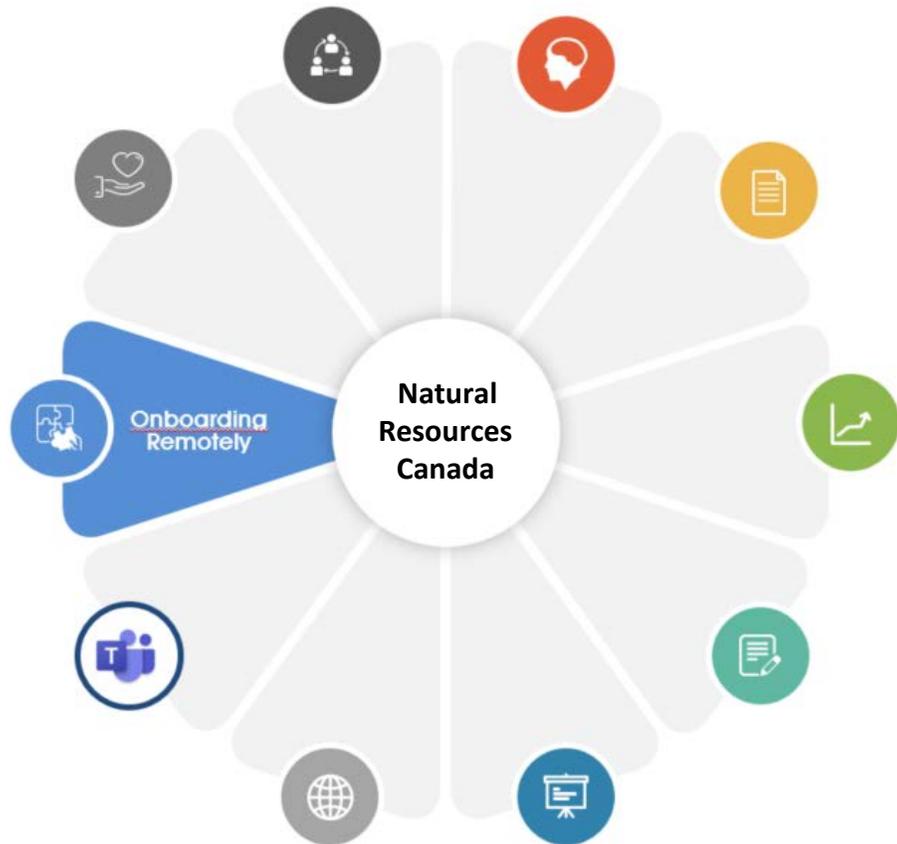


## Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams provides a good solution for instant messaging. However, always be mindful of how it is being used.

- ✓ **Availability.** Use the “status” option to indicate if you are available or not, and be mindful of the status of your colleagues and employees before messaging or calling them. Some people may prefer a warning before receiving a call. As a courtesy, ask them if they have time for a call before you initiate a call.
- ✓ **Response time.** Clarify that when a Teams message is sent, there is no expectation that the recipient will respond immediately. Respond when possible.
- ✓ **Respect.** Be mindful of your tone and words in all communication.
- ✓ **Engagement.** Turn your camera on when possible, even when you are not talking. It helps the speaker to “read the audience” and adjust themselves accordingly. If you cannot be on camera for any reason, you can let your team know.
- ✓ **Use your “mute” button.** It avoids echoes and background noises that distract from the conversation.

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## Onboarding Remotely

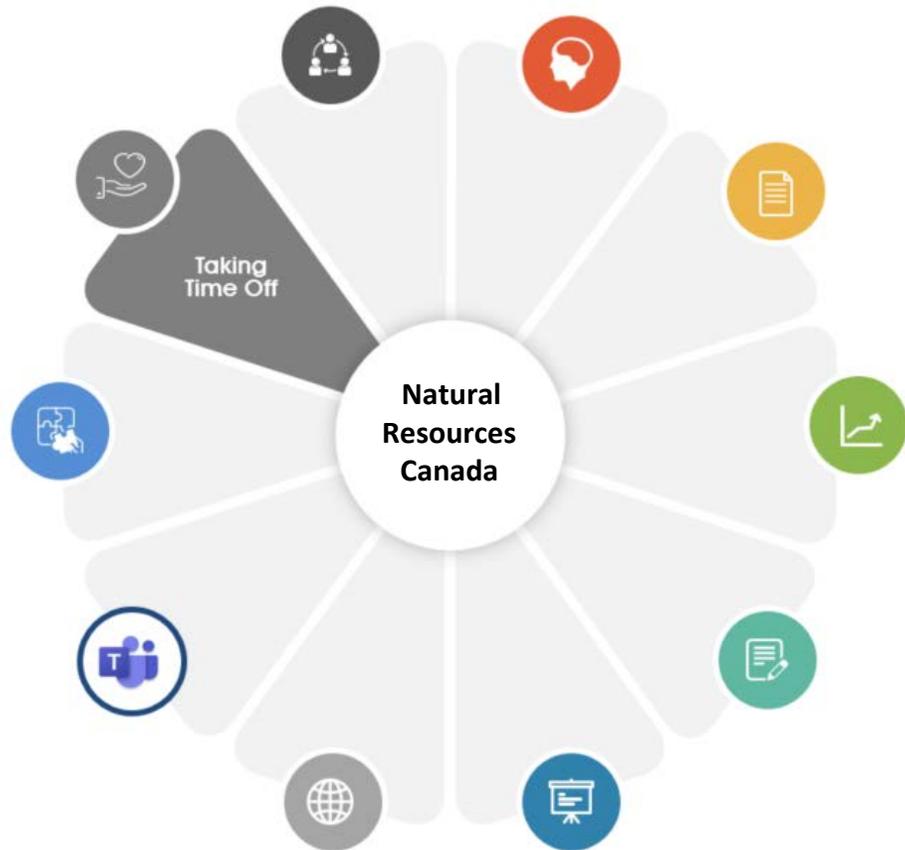
If you are welcoming a new team member in a remote environment:

- ✓ **Assign an onboarding partner.** This person should have a good knowledge of the team and other stakeholders. Please consult the [Onboarding Partner information](#).
- ✓ **Setup Meet and Greet** with the team and collectively.
- ✓ **Check-in often.** Schedule several short meetings with new employees in the first couple of months to establish inclusivity, and ensure they are understanding their importance to the team as well as their work objectives.
- ✓ **Suggest sit-ins.** If appropriate, invite the new employee to meetings where they can observe and listen to gain a broader understanding of the organisation.

If you are new to the organisation:

- ✓ **Be patient** and give yourself the time to fully understand the organisation, especially the culture.
- ✓ **Ask questions.** Reach out to colleagues for informal discussion to get to know them. Your team can help you get adjusted.
- ✓ **Connect with others.** Join one of [NRCan's many networks](#) to engage with other individuals and teams across the department.

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## Taking Time Off

- **Take the day off if you are sick.** You may be tempted to log on and work since you will be home anyway, but you must take care of yourself. Ask yourself – would you still go into the office if you felt the way you're feeling right now? If not, then take the day off and do not log on.
- **Discuss with your manager first...**
  - ✓ If you must take time during the day to run an errand or for an appointment.
  - ✓ If you want to make up time missed because of an errand or an appointment.
- **Take your annual leave.** You may be tempted to not take leave since you can't do the things you would normally do but holidays are essential to your health and well-being.
  - ✓ If you notice that your stress levels are always high, consider taking time off. It may prevent you from burning out and having to take extended leave later on.
  - ✓ If flexible work arrangements were previously made such as a compressed schedule, stick to it if possible: keeping a routine will help your mental health.
- **Familiarize yourself with wellness tips.** NRCan's [Protect Your Mental Health](#) page has a variety of tips and resources to help improve and maintain your mental health.