



Some operational conditions for going back to the office

In order to start thinking about going back to the office, your organization needs conditions like these:

1. Leadership and crisis management team

- If you don't have an interdisciplinary team, assemble one. This team's mandate is to advise how to stabilize, strengthen, and scale the organization. This team must make equitable decisions in the best interest of the mission and workforce well-being. It must practice scenario-planning, cost/benefit and risk analysis. It must inform safety protocols and organizational policies and practices. And it must advise on programmatic adjustments with all of this in mind.
- Make time for regular, structured meetings and feedback loops. Get dates on the calendar.
- Get clear on decision-making and justification process. You should be able to efficiently assess options and apply logics to questions to quickly achieve practicable, sustainable solutions. *(If your organization had trouble with decision-making before COVID-19, spend the time now to develop a process that works.)*
- Go slow. Stay remote as long as possible. Assume "back to the office" will happen in phases. *(Buy time by saying no return to office til DATE X, even if your state/locality eases restrictions before then.)*

2. Workforce focus

- Model/demonstrate that employee physical and psychological safety is paramount.
- Ensure key leaders have appropriate *(esp. with respect to confidentiality)* shared understanding of demographic, geographic and relevant personal info for all employees and 1099s. Identify at-risk employees.
- Get a sense of who wants to go back to office and who wants to stay remote.
- Get a sense of what roles should come back to office and which can stay remote—for now and with strategic future in mind *(scenarios)*.
- Establish a philosophy and basic parameters of--and practices to implement--equitable compensatory measures: bereavement gifts, hardship stipends, mileage/parking stipends, liberal bonuses, salary adjustments, changes to healthcare co-pays or premiums, etc.
- Establish practices/parameters around promotions and new hires. *(A temporary freeze is reasonable.)*

3. Dual infrastructures

- Be able to maintain a functional and secure remote infrastructure.
- Be able to maintain functional and safe physical infrastructure.
- Maintain equity in decision-making about both infrastructures.
- Develop phased timeline scenarios and budget models for maintaining both.

4. COVID-19 best practices and guidance resources

- Name person/team to track relevant, reliable COVID-19 guidance and best practice and keep leadership/crisis team apprised.
- Make both soft and hard resources readily available to staff.

5. Property details and facility needs

- Keep clear contact with landlord(s) on timelines, rules/requirements, and safety measures.
- Identify risk mitigation and optimal prevention conditions at the office.



5. Property details and facility needs, cont'd

- Sanitizing
- Distancing
- Limit exposure of physical items (*office supplies and equipment*)
- HVAC air flows
- Common areas (*shared restrooms, elevators, canteens, etc*)
- Other
- Examine insurance and liability considerations.

6. Technology and tech systems

- Engage reliable tech systems support (*and training*).
- Ensure useable, reliable and sufficient telecomms tools and systems.
- Ensure reliable cloud storage (*and ideally information architecture*).
- Conduct tech audit and plan for upgrades (*scenarios*).
- Ensure digital security policies and practices.

7. Finance and budget practices

- Name Finance lead/point of contact.
- Establish and communicate COVID-specific cost centers and codes.
- Develop COVID-specific scenario budgets.
 - Rent/occupancy and facility adjustments
 - Technology and connectivity adjustments
 - PPE and other accommodations
 - Benefits/fringe adjustments
 - Consultants and vendors
 - Courtesies, gifts, rewards, bonuses, stipends
 - Other

8. Stakeholder communication

- Ensure shared understanding of key audiences and channels of communication.
- Commit to regular updates with all key audiences, even when nothing is absolutely certain.
- Demonstrate transparency, equity and due diligence (*engenders stakeholder trust and receptiveness*).
- Make the implicit explicit.

9. Management + Leadership

- Convene and focus managers and directors. Charge them with their responsibility to ensure safety, provide feedback, sustain equity, practice accountability, enable employee effectiveness and provide direction, among other things.
- Keep managers apprised of strategic direction and plans, even when interim.
- Query supervisors about what they need to be effective.

10. Culture

- Demonstrate equity.
- Include diverse voices.
- Examine your organization's relationship with failure. (*There will be mistakes.*)
- Speak about culture with intentionality and promote using the COVID-19 disruption to co-create some new norms.