

Our Relationships Affect Our Health:

Return to Worksite Checklist for Leaders

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How to Use this Document

Introduction

Many organizations, businesses and community programs are beginning to reopen after the extended Shelter in Place period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some organizations have been providing essential services throughout the pandemic, but perhaps at reduced capacity. This document is intended to guide leaders through the multiple stages and considerations involved in bringing staff back to worksites and leading and supporting the complexities of this new environment. It outlines principles and practices designed to cultivate staff cohesion and community for on-site, deployed and remote staff.

Note: Because staff will likely return to worksites in phases, leaders may need to guide staff through the return to work stages while simultaneously preparing new cohorts of staff to return and continuing to support remote workers. In addition, it is recommended to have a plan in place for a surge event that may necessitate another Shelter in Place order.

Contents

- **Page 2 is a one-page checklist meant to be a stand-alone document.** It outlines four stages of supporting staff through worksite and workforce transitions and includes links to more detailed information found in subsequent pages. We encourage you to print out **page 2** only and post it near your desk as a reference and reminder.
- Pages 3-10 provide more detailed information and suggested examples of how to implement each item on the page 2 checklist. Please note these are guidelines and ideas only; it may not be feasible to implement all the suggestions.

Disclaimer: The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images, external links, and other material contained on this checklist and its guiding documents are for informational purposes only. No content on this checklist is intended to be a substitute for professional mental health advice or your Department of Human Resources policies and protocols. Always seek your human resources representative's advice with any questions you may have regarding employee relations and engagement protocols before undertaking a new worksite routine.

Our Relationships Affect Our Health:

Return to Worksite Checklist for Leaders

Moving towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic means organizational on-site operations will resume. Supporting the health and well-being of staff is critical. Proper planning will support strong working relationships, reduce anxiety, and facilitate a positive working atmosphere. Keep in mind that the length of the below phases may vary, and staff may return to worksites in stages. **Leaders** must focus on relational practices to help support staff through these phases while also preparing new cohorts of staff to return and continuing to support remote workers.

This guide outlines principles and practices that will cultivate staff cohesion and community for on-site, deployed and remote workers.



Phase 1: Preparation

Focus on Safety & Communication

- Gauge current staff well-being.
- Develop return to worksite protocols for safety in the workplace.
- Inform staff of new policies and supports related to returning to worksites.
- Empower staff to provide input and feedback on return to worksite policies and supports.



Phase 2

Focus on Presence & Community Building

- Welcome staff and provide ample opportunities to connect socially.
- Orient everyone to new rules for the workspace.
- Be open, available, and present for your staff in a proactive manner.



Phase 3

Focus on Relational Leadership

- Be human. Express and hold emotion and vulnerability.
- Be in tune with your staff's feelings and evolving needs. Provide related supports.
- Provide specific, genuine, and frequent appreciation to staff.



Phase 4

Focus on Reflection and Planning

- Begin establishing new routines and workflows.
- Create an environment that is reflective, not reactive.
- Continue to practice, model and support self-care for staff.



Phase 1: Preparation

Focus on Safety & Communication

Gauge Current Staff Wellbeing

- Consider administering a [short survey](#) to assess staff stress and feelings of support. Be sensitive to survey fatigue. If staff feel over-surveyed, utilize more individualized approaches described below.
- Work with supervisors/managers to:
 - Check in personally with staff about their health and wellbeing prior to their return to worksite with three questions:
 1. How are you holding up?
 2. Is there anything on your mind?
 3. What works for you and how can we support that?
 - Assess staff concerns, fears and hopes about returning to their worksites. Consider offering accommodations to help during their transition back to the worksite such as alternative or reduced work schedules to accommodate staff needs (parents managing school distance learning, staff who may need to work outside normal business hours, etc.) If staff are continuing to work remotely, consider offering the same accommodations to them.
- Use information gathered about staff wellbeing to begin implementing staff supports for return to worksite.

Develop Return to Worksite Protocols for Safety in the Workplace

Physical Safety

- Adhere to City of San Francisco [workplace safety directives](#).
- Review the [Center of Disease Control Workplace Decision Tool](#) in creating physical safety guidelines for staff.

Emotional Safety

- Create space for staff to share the hardships, fears, and struggles they faced and continue to face from the pandemic and other traumatic incidents. For example, as part of a virtual staff meeting prior to returning to worksite, create break-out rooms for small groups of staff to have these discussions.
- Encourage staff to prioritize their mental health and wellness (i.e. normalize and encourage staff to take mental wellness breaks and time off if they need it.)
- Encourage supervisors/managers to host weekly huddles to check in with staff and to keep a virtual “open door” policy for staff to check in throughout the day. Talk with staff about a helpful frequency for the huddles (weekly vs multiple brief huddles each week.)
- Plan regular connection activities throughout different workforce transitions (i.e. deployed and remote staff returning to worksites), paying attention to office guidelines for social distancing.

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Inform Staff of New Policies and Supports Related to Returning to Worksites

- Host a town hall with a Q&A session for leadership to share the return to worksite plan with staff. Ensure full participation.
- Encourage managers and/or the HR team to check in with staff on their understanding of the return to worksite plan.
 - Create communication tip sheets for managers with responses to common questions such as “What if my staff has childcare challenges and cannot return to the worksite? What if staff have no viable transportation options?”

Empower Staff to Provide Input and Feedback on Return to Worksite Policies and Supports

- Proactively solicit staff feedback by encouraging staff to indicate the following about the return to worksite plan (could be through email, check-ins with supervisors, during an all staff meeting or town hall):
 - One aspect they like about the plan
 - One aspect they would like to see improved about the plan
 - Any additions to the plan
- Assure staff of commitment to adapting policies and supports based on feedback and evolving staff wellness needs (i.e. creating time during all staff meetings to weigh in on recommended adjustments).





Welcome Staff and Provide Ample Opportunities to Connect Socially

- This phase is about connection. Your staff have not shared the same space for a while, so focus on bringing everyone together and not necessarily on restoring productivity.
- Establish a culturally sensitive welcome ritual for staff reconnection that observes social distancing and face mask use protocols. Utilize your local Equal Employment Opportunity office (EEO) or Human Resources department for help with culturally sensitive language and best practices. Examples include:
 - Morning “huddle” to share stories of appreciation for what staff missed about the workplace while not there
 - Greeting staff personally on their first day back to their worksites
 - Bringing plants to the worksite to help clean the air and mark new growth
 - Appreciation “scavenger hunts” in which each person takes photos of 4 people, places or objects they really missed while gone. Create a photo board so everyone can see even if they don’t work on same days or continue to work remotely.

Orient Everyone to New Rules for the Workspace

- Host an in-person staff meeting to remind staff of the new policies and supports and provide opportunity for questions and feedback.
 - If possible, ask a member of the development or review team to help present the new policies and supports.
 - Set group agreements about communicating around safety, including how you will compassionately communicate with each other when physical distancing and mask-wearing protocols are not being followed.
 - Post informational notices or flyers of the policies and supports throughout the workspace where staff can easily see them.
 - Use [positive reinforcement](#) to help promote and sustain COVID-19 safety protocols for the workplace. Note that you may need to continually revisit and remind people of the protocols at staff meetings.
- You may encounter resistance to new policies and procedures. If this occurs, it is important to not shut it down but rather personally connect with those who are hesitant about the new policies and procedures to hear their concerns.
 - Request one-on-one check-ins with these staff members and ask them how you can support them with their concerns. Be willing to offer accommodations and extra supports to these staff members to alleviate any concerns.
- Remember that even positive changes at work can cause stress among staff. Remind staff to be gentle with themselves as adjusting to new changes can take time.
 - Acknowledge that burnout and compassion fatigue are normal reactions to chronic stress. Encourage staff to take time off to recharge and tap into employer and community support and wellness services.

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Be Open, Available, and Present for Your Staff in a Proactive Manner

- Make yourself accessible.
 - Keep your calendar meeting-free as much as possible on the first day staff return.
 - Keep your door “virtually open.” If it is not possible to keep your door open while adhering to safety protocols, perhaps post a sign that says, “Door is closed to keep us all safe, but please knock or call to check in. I can’t wait to talk to you!”
- Lead with compassion.
- Make efforts to check-in with each staff member. If a staff member needs additional support, offer time for a one-on-one meeting to find out how you can support them.
 - Remind staff of the wellness supports that are in place.
 - After the one-on-one meeting, offer a follow-up check-in for continued support.





Be Human. Express and Hold Emotion and Vulnerability.

- Be honest about how the pandemic has affected you personally. Encourage openness by being open.
- Acknowledge stress, anxiety and uncertainty of the pandemic. For additional information, refer to these guidelines from the [National Safety Council](#).
- Provide opportunities for staff to express feelings.
 - Remember that we are all experiencing the “storm” of pandemic but that each person’s experience is different (different boats).
- Name and acknowledge grief and loss.
 - Your agency may have lost staff members due to COVID-19 or other causes and/or your agency staff may have lost family members.
 - Seek [additional resources](#) for supporting mental health and wellbeing as necessary.
- Create opportunities for healing in real time (in the moment) and through intentional, planned activities:
 - Metabolize the stress of the pandemic through activities such as healing circles; collective care/decompression sessions; and rage, reflection & restoration sessions.
 - Acknowledge and/or memorialize people who have left the agency or passed away through activities such as a physical and virtual (google doc) alter with photos and memorabilia; flower ceremony; and moments of silence.

Be in tune with your staff’s feelings and evolving needs. Provide related supports.

- Consistently remind staff of the policies and supports that are in place for wellness. Seek input on how policies and supports for wellness should evolve.
- Look out for changes in staff behavior. If a staff member does not appear to be their usual self, it is usually worth asking why.
- Be aware of staff workload and capacity for involvement in decision-making opportunities.
 - The stress of the pandemic can affect our capacity. We are all managing more than we were pre-pandemic. It may take a while for staff to reach their former capacity.
 - Be intentional about assigning work and setting realistic timelines to not overwhelm staff.
- Model self-care. Your staff are more likely to engage in self-care if they see you actively doing it as well.
 - Be mindful of how your own work habits affect others.
 - Develop agency communications and online meeting guidelines to mitigate video conferencing burnout. Allow staff to turn off video when needed for self-care reasons.
 - Make sure you’re taking breaks and connecting with others, and encourage your staff to do so as well.

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Provide Specific, Genuine, and Frequent Appreciation to Staff

- Consistently recognizing staff achievements can reduce anxiety and depression. Consider launching a staff appreciation campaign such as “Employee of the Week” or staff spotlight.
- Acknowledge staff for doing their part in keeping the worksite safe.
- Celebrate staff members who were deployed, providing essential services throughout the pandemic, and those who went (and continue to go) above and beyond the call of duty.
- Embed appreciation practices into agency culture.
 - Provide spaces for staff to recognize each other such as including a time for appreciations and gratitudes during staff meetings.
 - Proactively recognize collective care--moments in which a staff member goes above and beyond to tend to team members, workplace culture and/or connectedness.





Begin Establishing New Routines and Workflows

- Host a staff retreat to brainstorm sustainable routines for future worksite operations that take into account social distancing parameters and pandemic renewal efforts.
 - Use a framework such as the “Better Tomorrow” slide deck to engage staff in pandemic renewal planning.
- Create or repurpose workgroups to focus on the development of new routines and workflows. Offer opportunities for staff to join these workgroups.
- Dedicate ongoing time during staff meetings to receive feedback about routines and workflows.
- Allocate tools and resources to accommodate new workflow changes.

Create an Environment for Staff That is Reflective, Not Reactive

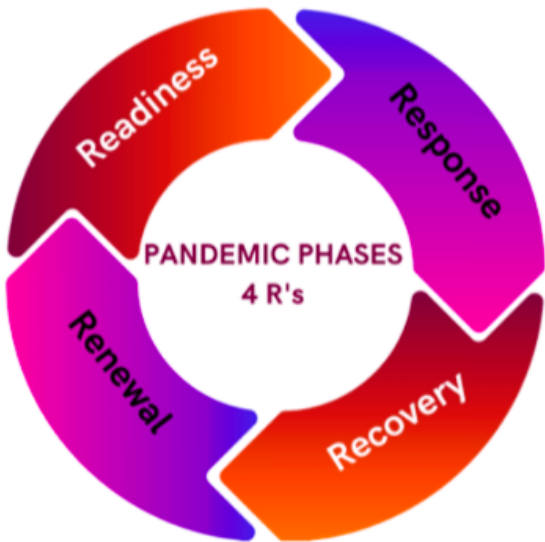
- Implement [structures](#) for staff meetings that include [check-ins](#).
- Implement [reflective supervision](#) in one-on-one meetings with staff.
- Do not shut down disagreements if they arise.
 - Use grounding activities to regulate your own emotions.
Try doing the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise. Working backwards from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. For example, list five things you hear, then four things you see, then three things you can touch from where you are at, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.
 - [Get support](#) if needed to manage these conversations.
- Practice compassion and openness to work through the challenges. Pay attention to what is said versus how it is expressed.

Continue to Practice, Model, and Support Self-Care for Staff

- Participate in group self-care activities with your staff throughout the week, such as mindfulness, yoga, joy and movement activities. You can pair up Mindful Moments (mindfulness practices) with Joyful Jams (music or art pop-ups) to help express and move stress through the body. When staff play together it enhances their ability to work together.
- Continue developing and participating in your own self-care routine and be open with your staff about it so that they feel encouraged to do so as well.
- Continue taking breaks throughout the day and remind your staff to do so as well.
- Be social with your staff and take time to connect with them on a personal level.
- Utilize suggestions in [Resourcing Practices for Leaders in Crisis](#) to ground, affirm, connect, and build structure for staff.



Pandemic Phases | 4R's



Readiness (Pre-pandemic): Power of anticipation. Prepare for crisis before it happens.

- Develop plan for information and resource sharing
- Prepare and develop public education tools
- Mental health disaster trainings
- Coordination
- Partnerships

Response (Crisis Response): Measures to protect and ensure community safety, reduce stress, and provide reassurance.

- Prioritizing critical services, psychological first aid, logistics, safeguard against discrimination and stigma
- Goals of interventions are safety and survival, meet basic needs, effective risk communication

Recovery: The process of restoring the social and emotional equilibrium by promoting positive coping skills and resilience.

- Focus on grief and bereavement, resilience and recovery, meaning-making and social cohesion
- Use partnerships and support groups to rebuild community, collective care, and support healing

Renewal: The collective experiences evolve in some ways to surpass or grow beyond what came before the mass trauma or pandemic.

- Reimagining systems and services
- Shared fates, collectivism, equity
- Greater appreciation
- New possibilities

[Click here](#) to view a 40-minute webinar on the 4 R's