

A Summary of Interactive Best Practices Workshops Findings and Tools to Guide Registries to Improve Data Reporting and Registry Operations

March 2021

Acknowledgment

This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number 6-NU38OT000286-01 funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Interactive Workshops Designed to Identify Tools and Best Practices to Improve and Support Central Cancer Registries' Operations

Overview and Background

Based on the recommendations for next steps from the first year of the project, *Identifying and Implementing Best Practices for Cancer Registry Operations*, the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries (NAACCR) planned and implemented a series of virtual interactive workshops aimed at identifying best practices and tools to improve and support registry reporting and operations. Although the workshops all focused on different challenges within central registry operations, a common purpose focused on allowing registry staff to share experiences and knowledge around these topics and compare different registry operational approaches to learn which methods were the most effective in diverse settings. Workshops were virtual due to COVID 19 constraints, but they were developed to allow maximum engagement among participants. All National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR)-supported registry staff were invited to participate in any and all of the workshops.

The purpose of this project was to plan and implement interactive workshops to facilitate discussion around best practices and tools for the following:

1. Developing and monitoring data management reports
2. Establishing strong communications and relationships with hospitals
3. Improving reporting from nonhospital sources
4. Managing best practices around the COVID-19 response

Because of COVID-19 and other time constraints, fully developed and vetted best practices could not be developed within the framework of this project. In NAACCR's experience, the development of best practices guidelines requires extended discussion and negotiation among a broad constituency. Consensus on best practices is often difficult to reach and not attainable within the framework of a brief virtual workshop. Nonetheless, these workshops produced substantial information on current and successful best practices used across NPCR registries. This information is summarized below, and tip sheets are offered containing ideas from registry directors. The summaries provided will serve as an excellent base to further develop these topics in the future.

A top salient benefit of these workshops was allowing the registries to exchange ideas freely on a selected topic. (See Appendix C, Workshop Evaluations.) Registries are always eager to share experiences, explain their approach to problems, and learn from others. In every breakout and workshop session creative ideas were shared, and registry directors heard about methods tried in other environments that might be useful in their own situation. We strongly recommend that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continue to facilitate such opportunities for exchange of ideas among the registries.

Workshop IV: Managing COVID-19 Response

The fourth in the series of workshops focused on Managing Best Practices around COVID Response. This workshop was held on January 27, 2021. The workshop agenda and schedule are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7. Structure of Workshop IV

Managing Best Practices around COVID Response Workshop	
Session One - 1/27/2021	Session Two - 1/27/2021
Breakout 1: Challenges in Human Resources	Unexpected positive outcomes from working remotely; challenges to working remotely; measures or changes identified to best accommodate the registries' current needs to be more agile or robust; preparing for the "new normal"
Breakout 2: Continuity of Operations Planning	
Breakout 3: Technical Challenges and Solutions	

Workshop Objectives

1. Review and assess how well disaster preparedness planning worked with the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Examine the impact of COVID-19 on central registry operations with a special focus on human resources, continuity of operations, and technical challenges.
3. Identify the opportunities and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic created for central registries.
4. Identify and develop tools, strategies, and best practices to prepare for the post-COVID-19 "new normal."

Each breakout session in Session One, listed above, focused on various operational components impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Session Two of this workshop reconvened all participants to share the summaries and recommendations from each of the breakout sessions. The remainder of Session Two focused on discussing opportunities and challenges ahead, creating a culture of change, and preparing for the new normal.

Workshop IV Attendance

Registries in 28 states and Washington, D.C., were represented (Table 8).

Table 8. Registries Participating in Workshop IV

Alabama	Idaho	Montana	South Carolina
Alaska	Indiana	New Hampshire	Tennessee
Arizona	Kentucky	New Jersey	Texas
Arkansas	Louisiana	New York	Vermont
Colorado	Maryland	North Carolina	Washington, D.C.
Florida	Massachusetts	North Dakota	
Georgia	Minnesota	Ohio	

Hawaii	Missouri	Oregon	
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Recommendations

Central registries may benefit from implementing tools and strategies in the following categories:

Challenges in Human Resources

- Don't forget the "human" in human resources. It is critical to have open communication and be understanding and flexible.
- Focus on both mental and physical self-care. Encourage time off and daily screen breaks.
- Plan social activities to keep staff engaged and part of the team.
- Document teleworking policies.
- Document production expectations.
- Detail orientation plans for new staff.
- Continue to support education.

Continuity of Operations

- Continue to identify and institute cloud-based and other solutions that facilitate work from a dispersed workforce. Identify methods to improve bandwidth and connectivity; consider both hardware and software solutions.
- Develop robust work-from-home policies and productivity expectations. Develop a teleworking training video for staff. Include discussions of working from home in annual evaluations.
- Maintain team calendars that can be accessed by all staff to identify whether individuals are working from home or in the central office. Develop standardized work rotations to the office if feasible.
- Maintain an up-to-date inventory list. This will be helpful if staff need to take equipment home.
- Provide additional manuals for home use if desired by staff.
- Allow credit card purchases for office supplies and low-cost hardware (e.g., keyboards, mice). Provide some staff with credit cards or provide one for use by the unit in such emergencies for small purchases.
- Maintain an up-to-date staff list with emails and telephone numbers for emergency contacts. Consider establishing a telephone tree and running periodic drills.

- Consider purchases of software and hardware that make working from home more efficient as allowable costs on grants and cooperative agreements.

Technical Challenges and Solutions

- Review telecommuting agreements to ensure that they adequately cover security and confidentiality issues.
- Review and update disaster preparedness plans to ensure the transition to remote work is swift, with adequate equipment to facilitate potential long-term operational transition.
- Inventory equipment for potential long-term remote work, including computer workstations, telephones, and communication options.
- Ensure robust IT support to address software and hardware issues.

The CDC might consider the following recommendations:

- Assess budgetary needs for central registries and allow flexibility with expenditures that improve efficiencies in the home office environment.
- Consider purchases of software and hardware that make working from home more efficient as allowable costs on grants and cooperative agreements.
- Assess the impact of disasters on the central registry's ability to meet annual call for data standards and timelines.

Summaries of Each Breakout Session

Don't forget the HUMAN in Human Resources

Challenges in Human Relations

All the states participating in the Human Resource breakout session are teleworking either full-time or part-time. Some states had staff teleworking prior to the pandemic, but for most it was new and required a lot of coordination and adjustments. Several states reported that staff were reassigned to work on COVID-19 projects. One state reported that at one point 75 percent of its staff were reassigned.

Everyone reported that staff are happy working from home; concerns were raised about how to transition back to the office when the time arrives. Many registries are working with their human resource offices to implement a permanent teleworking policy.

Under the human resource umbrella, the group discussed the importance of self-care, being aware of other household challenges, maintaining production, and continuing education.

Key Findings:

- **Self-care:** Self-care is key to maintaining harmony between work and home life. Many states have programs that are offered through their health departments or universities that cover self-care. Everything from daily emails about mental and physical health to having a psychologist present at a staff meeting and being available for counseling was discussed. Many registries have been scheduling social activities, such as virtual happy hours, online games, holiday parties, etc. These social activities provide staff time to connect on a personal level with no discussions about work. Some attendees reported they have learned things about their staff that they never knew even when reporting to the office.

Part of self-care is ensuring staff are taking time off and disconnecting from work. Suggestions include keeping the computer and other devices off, taking daily breaks from the screen, making sure you have lunch, taking walks, and stretching often. All participants reported that no restrictions were implemented to hinder the use of vacation time. Many are either re-assigned to COVID-19 activities or covering other staff that have been and are being stretched thin at work, not to mention the pandemic's impact on personal lives. Actually, staff are encouraged to use leave time because managers need to be aware of potential staff burnout.

- **Household Challenges:** Many staff have other family members also working from home, as well as children attending school online. As a result, it is important to maintain open communication to understand what staff are dealing with, so managers can provide support and adjustments as required. Some states reported being able to offer flexible hours while teleworking. Some states allow staff to work for several hours in the morning, log off to care for children and assist with schoolwork, and then log back in later in the day to finish up workday. Other states require staff to keep normal work hours with little to no flexibility.
- **Maintaining Production:** While maintaining harmony and being aware of self-care, it is also important to make sure staff are remaining productive throughout the day. Most states reported staff complete daily or weekly production reports. Software-generated reports also are used to monitor production. All states reported that after the initial adjustment to teleworking, staff are as productive—if not more productive—working from home.

Fortunately, most states did not have any difficult staff performance issues to deal with. A few had some staff not meeting production expectations; however, these were improved through the use of email reminders, and if necessary, telephone interventions. Some states reported staff using the excuse that “my internet is down” frequently. As a result, staff now have educational webinars and other activities saved on their desktop to ensure work productivity even if internet access is limited.

- **Education:** Teleworking has actually increased the ability for staff to attend national conferences when previously travel restrictions prevented multiple staff from participating. Some concerns were mentioned that when “normal” work routines return, states may have difficulty justifying travel to in-person conferences (e.g., NAACCR and NCRA) that were conducted virtually during the pandemic. In addition, many states participate in the NAACCR webinars and are using FLccSC to train their own staff and reporting facilities.

Training new staff virtually takes a considerable planning and time. More follow-up and documentation are needed because of remote work status. It is particularly challenging to onboard a new staff member to make them feel a part of the team and offer the intensive training required for registry work.

Continuity of Operations

Maintaining continuity of operations during any crisis or disaster is a major priority for central registries, and the mandated office shutdowns of many state and university offices in March 2020 due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant disruption to registry operations. Registries were forced to be agile and adjust very quickly without the benefit or any prior experience dealing with a similar situation.

Key Findings

- **Transition to Remote Work:** Registries had to arrange for staff to take computers (desktops), monitors, chairs and other equipment home and establish new offices. Some staff created makeshift workspaces (converting closets to maintain privacy and a secure environment), while others were able to establish more formal work areas. In general, all staff established workspaces conducive to working with confidential data and instituted policies consistent with strict privacy requirements.

Registries that had already instituted work-from-home policies, telecommuting, and electronic reporting had an easier transition to the new way of working with a distributed work force.

- **Positive Aspects of Working Remotely:** All registries now have at least some capacity for staff to work off site, and this has been beneficial. Working from home was cited as reducing turnover (fewer retirements due to long commutes, happier with work environment) and increased productivity (fewer distractions).
- **Negative Aspects of Working Remotely:** Working from home has also introduced some negative aspects into the workplace, such as decreasing the number of informal interactions that lead to innovation, creativity, and quick problem solving. Hiring and training new staff has become even more difficult due to the distributed workforce environment.
- **Workflow Impact:** Registries have proven themselves to be creative and resourceful in establishing solutions to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce. In addition, they have developed methods to maintain workflow and data processing to compensate for the traditional methods that are no longer available to them. Staff work through remote connections to the central database. Many registries reported that increased remote access to hospital data was a silver lining to the pandemic, with hospitals now allowing access via secure portals. Electronic auditing of reporting facilities has now completely replaced on-site audits.

A few registry functions remain difficult to achieve in the new work environment, including death clearance, on-boarding physician offices and other facilities using electronic reporting, training of new staff, and team building. In addition, long-term changes in workflow and data processing may need to be considered. Many registries have not yet examined their processes to identify roadblocks and bottlenecks. They are

still working in a temporary environment. However, these changes might remain in some form for many years to come, if not indefinitely. If so, we must all look at our data flow models to ensure timely, efficient, and accurate reporting of quality cancer data.

- **Future Considerations:** The registries are uncertain if they will ever return to a consolidated workforce in a single location. Most anticipate that at least some staff will work from home for the long term. Most registries anticipate making changes to their physical environments if they do return, including more space between cubicles, lower capacity thresholds, and staggered work hours. Some registries worry that staff who are now enjoying more flexible work hours and reduced commuting will not be pleased if these benefits are revoked. However, most registries are required to follow agency policy and may not have the autonomy to set their own work standards.

Looking to the future, most registries are still seeking solutions to IT issues (improved connections, security measures, and software and hardware that make remote working more efficient).

Registries anticipate the need to develop more formalized work-from-home policies and adapting other long-standing policies, including work hours, use of personal and work equipment, and home security.

Technical Challenges and Solutions

In this breakout session, participants discussed the technical challenges encountered with shifting to work remotely. This involved equipment, internet connectivity, and communication issues. This group also discussed security issues, as well as ongoing operational challenges.

Key Findings

- **Equipment and Software**
 - Registries with no previous remote-working staff were the least prepared and took the longest to restore operations.
 - Some registries had limited laptop computers for remote use and were ill prepared to provide equipment to all staff now working remotely, while other registries had some staff already working remotely and were able to obtain additional laptop computers from other programs.
 - Although many registries had laptop computers to continue minimal work efforts, a long-term equipment solution needed to be developed by most registries.
 - Although some registries had laptops, they had trouble with VPN range and needed to triple the VPN range.
 - Another registry allowed staff to come into the office to bring home their entire desktop workstation. This allowed access to all their electronic files on their local and network servers. Minimal work disruptions and down time were experienced with this approach.
 - Except for contractors, registry staff are not permitted to use their personal equipment to conduct business work.

- **Internet connection:** Some registries reimbursed their staff internet connection. One registry provided its staff living in rural areas with hot spots. If staff required remote access to their workstations and the equipment was shutdown, remote access could not be established. Ethernet cables were provided for staff at some registries to connect to their router; however, this limited the home office setup, because cables needed to be near the router.
 - **Other connectivity issues cited:** Potential instability when the home has a high volume of users (work, distance learning, gaming, etc.) is a serious problem.
 - Wi-Fi adaptors and Wi-Fi extenders were cited as tools to improve connectivity. Issues that could impact connectivity included large mirrors and large metal objects between the computer station and the router, which can cause connectivity issues. Although the computer equipment may be the same, there was still much variation in equipment-related issues experienced while working from home; a strong IT support system is necessary to identify and improve individual remote work environments.
 - **Other equipment considerations:** Headsets (wireless or wired), cameras, portable standing desks, and office chairs were all issues. Most registries did not provide for staff to have printers while working remotely.
 - **Telephones:** Some registries purchased Magic Jack telephones for their staff. Others had a limited number of cell phones, and the manager was able to purchase additional cell phones for some staff. Some registries use a softphone application, such as ZoiPer, for VoIP calls over Wi-Fi. Zoiper runs on many different platforms.
 - Some registry staff use their personal cell phones to conduct business because of a lack of alternative telephone or communication options available, but unlike internet connections, personal cell phone use is usually not reimbursed by the registry.
 - **Other Communication Tools:** Use of Microsoft Teams, Skype, or Zoom was cited as a communication tool option.
- **Confidentiality and Security**
 - Most registries had teleworking agreements in place with specific requirements, but may have been enhanced (locked bags, description of office space, and equipment).
 - Very few staff had printers, decreasing the risk associated with paper documents.
 - Promoting best practices for telecommuting around security helped ensure compliance.
- **Operations That Did Not Translate Well to Remote Work**
 - Any paper-based operations (e.g., death clearance, faxes, mail-based processes)
 - Shift to more electronic approaches with more document scanning
 - Onboarding of new staff and staff terminations

- No impact on hospital audits conducted remotely, unless hospital staff was unavailable (due to furloughs or temporary staff reductions)

Afternoon Session—Unexpected Positive Outcomes, Longer-Term Challenges, and Preparing for the New Normal

During the afternoon, the workshop moved into more forward-looking discussions seeking to anticipate some of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have in the longer term for central cancer registries. Participants brainstormed together and focused on the following issues:

- Identifying any unexpected positive outcomes from dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.
- Assessing continuing or anticipated challenges that will need to be addressed.
- Examining the role of change management in dealing with COVID-19 by central registries.
- Preparing for the new normal as vaccination strategies are implemented and return to work is anticipated.

Unexpected Positive Outcomes from the COVID Crisis

Discussions revealed that overall, most central registries performed extremely well during the COVID crisis. Most programs were forced to shift from in-person offices to remote work in early March with many having less than a day or two to prepare. The challenges were demanding, as the morning breakout session discussions demonstrated. However, registries have clearly risen to face these arduous circumstances, and this success prompted an afternoon discussion of what unexpected positive outcomes might have arisen from the crisis that might have longer-lasting impact on registries. These included the following:

- **Remote work is working:** Most registries reported that the shift to remote work was very positive, establishing evidence that telecommuting and work from home options are a viable for longer-term operations. Programs were already feeling the pressure to offer flexible work hours prior to COVID-19 to recruit and retain younger staff who want more trackable working conditions. During the pandemic, registries demonstrated that flexible work hours offer such benefits as higher productivity, strong teamwork, and happier employees. During discussions, several participants urged central registry directors to document any higher productivity and employee satisfaction for senior management to encourage moving toward this new way of working.
- **Balancing the human needs with the business needs of the program:** During the pandemic, managers needed to be even more understanding and empathetic to staff while monitoring productivity and overall operations. Staff morale was higher when managers reached out regularly and were willing to help staff cope with the challenges of remote schooling, young children staying at home all day, competition for limited broadband among family members, and caregiving for elderly or sick family members. At the same time, it was critical to maintain registry operations to continue workflow and meet deadlines. Balancing the human needs of staff with the demands of strong management during the crisis was essential to success.

- **Teambuilding and communication:** Registries reported that staff all pitched in during the crisis to make things work for the program. Bonding among team members appeared stronger, collaborations intensified, and innovative problem solving increased. Managers worked to build teams by making sure employees felt heard and valued. Participants recognized that new technology such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx was critical to the successful transition to remote work. Weekly meetings were scheduled for staff, and time was included to share how things were going. Managers emphasized work-life balance and maintaining health and safety. Quick telephone calls, texts, and chats also contributed to success. Capturing this success over the long term will require reflection on the lessons learned during this experience and building these tactics into everyday operations.

Facing Longer-Term Challenges

Although registries coped extremely well with the crisis and dealt with numerous challenges, the concern that this success is only temporary and not permanent was voiced often. In addition, several barriers or problems either remain unsolved or are emerging as serious long-term problems. These include the following:

- **Staff mental health and wellness:** Employees often feel high levels of stress despite managers' efforts to be supportive. Many staff are juggling work with family or may be working in isolation with limited human contact. Worry about job security, furloughs, and the long-term impact of COVID-19 are common. Staff miss working together in person and the opportunity for informal conversations or personal interaction. The mental and behavioral health of employees is a priority that must be in the forefront for all managers. Employee assistance programs, work-life balance programs, and stress management may all help vulnerable staff, but managers must play a key role in identifying and monitoring the mental wellness of their staff. This is particularly challenging in remote settings.
- **New staff training and onboarding:** Because central registry staff must be highly trained in very technical and complex material, new staff training is intensive with mentoring and shadowing required for long periods during initial training. Remote learning platforms offer the fundamental information that new employees need, but quick advice, encouragement, clear information, and feedback require mentoring and strong relationships. During COVID-19, registries have struggled to onboard, mentor, and develop new employees. This issue is a serious concern with long-term impact on central registries already struggling with staff shortages.
- **Potential budget and resource reallocation:** Many registries lost staff who were reallocated to COVID-19 response initiatives; several were hired for higher salaries by those programs. Freezes are in place, and staff may not be replaced. Programs relying on general state funds faced cut, and budgets may be reduced even more if assistance is not offered to states at the federal level. Registries already facing very tight budgets are worried that they may not survive further reductions in funding. In addition, COVID-19 is adding extra work as registries are now tracking the pandemic's impact on cancers. Flexibility in budget allocation by federal funders to allow quick apportionment for emergency needs will be critical as programs transition back to worksites.
- **Security of confidential data and information:** The risk of security breaches or misuse of confidential data is higher in remote settings. Although such safeguards as use of

VPNs, state- or program-owned equipment, and confidential data policies do offer some protections, more training and focus on the importance of staff's protecting confidential information in remote settings should be developed.

- **Equipment and software:** Remote work policies should delineate procedures regarding use of personal equipment, software requirements and updates, such shared resources as manuals, and cost allocations for use of private telephones and internet. If equipment and software is owned by the agency, then clear policies and procedures about its use and care are needed. Internet issues continue to plague programs with staff often having bandwidth problems requiring more modern routers, Wi-Fi enhancers, and repeaters. Business telephone lines may be needed. Registries need to consider the possible costs incurred with hybrid systems wherein employees may be in the office a few days a week and home other days. These are all solvable problems, but they require attention if programs are to succeed into the future.
- **Outdated government infrastructures:** For registries housed in government agencies, the infrastructure may not be in place to support long-term needs around remote work or crisis management. Antiquated software systems, limited internet bandwidth, restricted desktop application, and outdated policies all hold back agility and success.

Preparing for the New Normal

Several specific concerns and opportunities were identified by participants as important to the successful transition to the new normal. These include the following:

- **Preparing a safe return to the workplace:** Any return to the workplace must ensure employee safety and wellness. Workspaces must be carefully organized to ensure physical distancing. Mask wearing will be required and congested locations closed or re-routed. This will likely result in less than half of the normal staff being in the office at any time. Monitoring for compliance and constant distraction from work activities may reduce productivity. A process for testing or monitoring employee's health must be in place, which involves technical and logistical strategies. Vaccination policies must be established and monitored. Will vaccination be required? If someone refuses to be vaccinated, how do we protect those in the office who may be vaccinated but could still be carriers if exposed? Complex procedures and policies will be required before staff can return to the workplace safely. Such a situation will mean shifts in scheduling or a hybrid approach to working. Planning is essential, and registry directors may have limited control over these decisions, making this more challenging.
- **Staff who want to stay remote:** As one participant pointed out, *it is very hard to take something back, once it is given*—so any attempt to bring back staff to the office on a full-time basis will be fraught with consequences. Although some staff may welcome a return, many have found convenience and comfort in working from home and wish to continue with remote working. According to a McKinsey survey, 80 percent of people report that they enjoy working from home, 41 percent report being more productive, and 28 percent say they are as productive.ⁱ Can these staff be forced back to the office? If so, what consequences will result? Will staff leave for positions where more flexibility exists? Will workers be unhappy to return and what will that do for productivity? How can we help staff with this transition, so it is smooth and seamless? All these issues will need to be addressed before we can return to the workplace.

- **Long-term impact of COVID-19 on staff:** It is not clear what the long-term impact of COVID will be on staff. Will health issues continue for those who were sick? Will there be emotional scarring or social concerns that will require extra support for staff? What type of sick leave policies will need to be in place for these circumstances? Will adequate employee assistance programs be available for staff facing these situations? These all need to be answered before we can go back into the workplace.
- **Impact of COVID on cancer reporting:** COVID-19 has created just as many challenges for reporters as the central registries themselves. Some hospitals have furloughed 40 percent of their staff, making any reporting by hospital registries almost impossible. Physician groups were closed except for emergency situations. Radiology, surgical centers, and ambulatory care centers have seen services slow significantly. Telehealth is becoming common, but will data be as accurate from such remote settings? Although central registries strive to maintain timeliness and quality, the future may be fraught with backlogs and catchup. Given the stress on central registries already, CDC, SEER, NAACCR, and other standard setters may want to prepare for more flexible policies to allow registries to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Change Management and Agility

“Change is the only constant for those of us working for central cancer registries,” was a comment made by a registry director who pointed out that registry staff must be agile in dealing with not only COVID-19 but also the many changes required by standard setters in the cancer surveillance community. However, coping with the aftermath of COVID-19 and the new normal may require a transformational shift of previously unforeseen levels. New work processes, technological developments, and new organizational designs that may emerge in the post-COVID-19 period will be successful only if staff and stakeholders buy into these changes. Long-standing practices and cultural values may need to undergo serious assessment and eventual alterations. Will we start to live in silos? Will the registry community erode over time without physical interaction? Will collaborations diminish? Will there be less mentorship and staff development? Permanent change will require exceptional change-management skills and constant pivots based on how well the effort is working over time.ⁱⁱ For all these reasons, increased attention to change management, including training and supportive services, will be necessary for future success of registries. The cancer surveillance community has long recognized that change is hard. There is no time when embracing agility and nimbleness will be more important than in the coming period as we continue to cope with the impact of the pandemic and transition into the post-COVID-19 era.

ⁱ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19#>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19#>

Tips to Ensure Continuity of Operations During COVID-19

Discussions during the workshops resulted in the following recommendations to guide you with your continuity of operations during COVID or a similar disaster.



Continue to identify and institute cloud-based and other solutions that facilitate work from a dispersed workforce. Identify methods to improve bandwidth and connectivity; consider hardware and software solutions.



Develop robust work-from-home policies and productivity expectations. Develop a teleworking training video for staff. Include discussions of working from home in annual evaluations.



Maintain team calendars that can be accessed by all staff to identify whether individuals are working from home or in the central office. Develop standardized work rotations to the office if feasible.



Maintain an up-to-date inventory list, in case staff need to take equipment home.



Provide additional manuals for home use if desired by staff.



Allow credit card purchases for office supplies, and low-cost hardware (e.g., keyboards, mice). Provide some staff with credit cards or provide one for use by the unit in such emergencies for small purchases.



Maintain an up-to-date staff list with emails and telephone numbers for emergency contacts. Consider establishing a telephone tree and running periodic drills.



Consider purchases of software and hardware that make working from home more efficient as allowable costs on grants and cooperative agreements.

Tips to Manage Staff and Technology During COVID-19

Discussions during the workshops resulted in the following recommendations.

Keep the focus on the HUMANS in human resource management during a disaster.



Tips for managing staff during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

- Encourage open communication; be understanding and flexible.
- Focus on self-care, both mentally and physically. Support staff's taking time off, as well as regular breaks from the screen.
- Plan social activities to keep staff engaged and feel part of the team.
- Document teleworking policies and production expectations.
- Provide detailed orientation plans for new staff.
- Continue to support education.



Tips for managing technology issues during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Review telecommuting agreements to ensure they adequately cover security and confidentiality issues.
- Review and update disaster preparedness plans to ensure a swift and comprehensive transition plan for staff to work remotely.
- Inventory equipment for potential long-term remote work, including computer workstations, telephones, and communication options.
- Ensure robust IT support to address software and hardware issues.