READY TO RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE
25 PROMPTS FOR AGENCY LEADERS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal employees have remained on duty, many going to their workplaces to get the job done. Those who could telework have done so and performed well. As preparations continue for a full return to workplaces, agency leaders—like airline captains reviewing a pilot checklist—have a wide range of enterprise issues to consider. The Partnership for Public Service developed the following prompts, drawn from leaders across the government, to supplement planning for a return to the workplace.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Information and Coordination on Public Health Data

☐ **Public health conditions**
How are you assessing public health conditions in states and communities where you have employees or contractors? Are there duty stations where local information is up-to-date and reliable?

☐ **Contact tracing**
Are procedures and communication plans in place at your agency to notify members of the workforce if an employee tests positive for the coronavirus and was in the workplace? How are you ensuring privacy protections?

☐ **Local issues**
In regions reliant on public transportation, is mass transit open? What precautions are being taken by these transit authorities? Is parking available for commuters? Are schools in session? Is childcare available?

Facilities

☐ **Cleaning**
Are protocols in place to comply with EPA and CDC guidance to clean contaminated workplaces? Does the agency or landlord cover these costs? Are contract changes needed for custodial services? How often will cleaning occur once employees return? Will employees be responsible for cleaning their work areas and will they be provided with cleaning products? Are you evaluating heating, ventilation and air condition systems?

☐ **Screening**
How will screening be handled? How will security procedures be modified? If there are multiple tenants in the building, who is leading and coordinating this effort? Will temperatures be taken, and if so, by whom and how? What screening questions will be asked? What are the criteria by which someone will not be allowed to enter the workplace? Will employees have any pre-arrival requirements, such as home temperature checks, self-assessment questions or approval forms? How are you ensuring privacy protections for this information?

☐ **Social distancing**
What social distancing measures will be in place within the facilities? Will groups of employees work during different time periods? Will office configurations be changed? Will there be guidance on conducting meetings to ensure social distancing, as well as on use of stairwells, elevators and other physically compact spaces? Will video teleconferencing be used if conference rooms exceed capacity? How will common spaces like break rooms be handled? Will private office doors remain closed? Will cafeterias be open?

☐ **Face coverings**
Will cloth face coverings be required in the office all day, only in certain situations and in enclosed offices? Will face coverings be provided to employees? Will they be reimbursed for the cost?

☐ **Visitors**
Have you decided if visitors will be allowed into the workplace? If so, what screening procedures will be used for entry? How are you communicating this information?

☐ **Customer service**
What protective measures need to be taken where employees provide direct services to the public? Do plexiglass shields need to be installed or arrangements made for social distancing to protect the employees and the customers in ways that accommodate the delivery of necessary services?

Communication and Employee Engagement

☐ **Workforce morale**
How will you gauge workforce morale and concerns before and after the return to the workplace? How are you welcoming employees back from teleworking while also supporting those who continued to come into work as critical or classified staff? How will you prepare first line supervisors for the return of employees? Have you offered any training or guidance on work-life balance for employees given the difficulties of the current situation?

☐ **Internal communications**
What communication efforts are being used to share information about the return to the workplace? Are employees hearing from agency leaders about the decision-making process to reopen the workplace? Are additional resources, such as an online microsite, all-staff town halls or virtual sessions available for employees to be kept informed and feel engaged?

☐ **Employee relations**
What training will be added to prepare employee relations teams to address employee concerns? How will Employee Assistance Program services be provided?

☐ **New employees**
Are there any changes planned for onboarding new employees in the current situation? What forms and tasks will need to be completed when the new employee arrives at the workplace? How will new employee orientation and welcome efforts be held?

☐ **Caregiving**
What considerations are in place to assist employees working at home with caregiving responsibilities for children, disabled or older family members?

☐ **Unions**
Have you been in steady communication with bargaining units throughout the current situation? What have you learned through discussions with unions and how will you work together to address them? If union negotiations were underway prior to the pandemic, did negotiations continue? If not, how will you reengage?

☐ **External affairs**
How have you kept oversight and appropriations committees, and key members of Congress and staff informed throughout the current situation? How will you handle briefings and hearing preparations? How have you kept grantees and other stakeholders informed, and how will you reengage?

☐ **Contractors**
How will you handle reentry of contractors to the workplace? Are there any contract changes that need to be made? Do contracts require your agency to provide personal protective equipment if contractors need to be in the government workplace?

Policies and Programs

☐ **Governance models**
What is your agency's decision-making body for bringing employees back into the workplace? Has a multidisciplinary task force been created, or is this run through an existing office? If a COVID-19 response task force was previously created, are the same people or functions included in the reconstitution task force? How will future decisions be made?

☐ **Telework**
To what extent will telework continue after mandatory telework ends? Will employees who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, or are a caregiver for people who are vulnerable to the virus according to CDC guidelines, have additional telework flexibility?

☐ **Travel**
Do you have a policy in place to guide mission-essential travel, and what conditions will exist for the traveler? For example, will the employee be required to telework for two weeks after a work trip? Can employees use privately owned vehicles for work travel and get related costs reimbursed by the agency? Do your travel policies need enhancements to promote employee safety? Can travel be avoided by virtual collaboration or use of field staff or government partners to accomplish efforts?

☐ **Innovation**
What new or improved practices, processes and tools have been developed or more widely used in the current situation? How should these be continued during normal operations and how will you train your workforce to use them? Which are best practices for future crisis situations? Are special efforts necessary for IT infrastructure to continue to support these tools?

☐ **Events and conferences**
Has a threshold been established to begin to hold in-person events again? What safety precautions will be used? Which programs could have virtual delivery?

Risk Management and Contingency Planning

☐ **Disaster preparedness**
Do your continuity of operations plans need to be changed? Are you planning on creating tools and resources to guide the workforce through any future incidents such as natural disasters or cyber intrusions?

☐ **Case resurgence**
What procedures are in place if the pandemic worsens? For workplaces with telework capability, when would a return to maximum telework be triggered and who decides?

☐ **What technical capabilities need to be revisited now?**
Do employees need technological tools or software in case maximum telework is required again? Do you need to upgrade or change your current electronic collaboration tools? Is your agency infrastructure sufficient and resilient?