

TIPS AND GUIDELINES DURING THIS COVID-19 PERIOD

A. Successful Remote Working Arrangements

B. Workforce options

A. Successful Remote Working Arrangements

For organizations and people unaccustomed to regularly working remotely, this arrangement may feel “strange”, especially initially. Following are some general tips and guidelines to help NSOs and their staff successfully transition to remote work, applicable in general and not just during this pandemic.

1. Practical logistics of working remotely where this is an option

- Ensure employees are equipped and appropriately supported to work at home. For example,
 - Does your NSO’s IT framework support work at home, ex. access, security?
 - What equipment and materials can be taken home and under what circumstances? Are there any privacy and security policies and/or insurance implications?
- Ask employees if they have everything they need to complete their work from home.
- Set expectations. Working from home can be a challenge so provide employees with focus via clear objectives and expectations. Being clear on expectations/deadlines/timelines allows people to work towards goals versus feeling adrift and isolated.

2. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

- Remote should not mean forgotten.
- Communications require more planning and discipline, and frequency. Managers need to connect with their employees and team more regularly than normal.
- Set up regular video / phone meetings to discuss work status as well as to see how everyone is doing and whether they need any help. Ensure these meetings are safe spaces for discussion so, if necessary, develop ground rules as a team.
- Videos are very important because they are more personal - you can see each other!
- Use a variety of channels and mediums to collect employee feedback and to stay in touch.
- If needed, provide refresher training on work tools to ensure employees are able to use them effectively, for example, video meeting options, calendars, shared sites, etc.
- Ensure employees are made aware of changes that impact them and/or the organization on a timely basis.
- Set and communicate dates for reviewing the status, terms, programs and viability of continuation of work at home until another future date.

3. Let's remember that we're all human.

- Managers should lead by example, including:
 - showing that they are not afraid to be vulnerable during this challenging time
 - acknowledging that employees may be concerned about their job security
 - avoiding sending emails / leaving voicemails after hours to not create pressure about always being "on". Be clear that 24/7 is not expected or required.
 - asking employees what they need from them and being available
 - trusting employees to do their work and giving staff reason to trust them
 - being willing to delegate authority and responsibility
 - being sensitive and vigilant regarding employees who may be experiencing medical, social or personal anxiety (hence the importance of regularly staying in touch with employees, both individually and as a team)
 - encouraging employees to:
 - avail themselves of employee assistance programs, if available, or provide access and links to other public resources
 - take regular breaks and exercise
 - stay connected to their social networks (friends, family, other)

4. Review your policies, or create them if they don't yet exist

- Health and Safety, both physical and mental, should remain top of mind.
- Do your work / employee policies need to be more flexible to accommodate personal situations such as child care issues.
- Consider where and how accommodations can be made for personal circumstances. For example, look at policies regarding hours of work, vacation, personal leave, banked OT.
- As much as possible, be flexible and employee-focused during these times, for example, regarding meeting times, time of day work is actually done, varied hours, use of vacation/unpaid leaves, shorter term goals/tasks.
- Look at moving work around to balance workloads if necessary, if even temporarily.
- This could be a good time to ensure any on-line training/development is completed.
- Set and communicate dates for reviewing the status, terms, programs and viability of continuation of work at home until another future date.

B. Workforce options

There may be job/positions that simply cannot be done from home. In this case, carefully review:

- Who needs to still be on-site? Why? To what degree?
- How will you be able to support the health and safety of employees on-site?
- Any issues regarding scheduling and balancing workloads?
- If working remotely is not viable and payroll continuation is also not feasible, then consider:
 - i. **Job-sharing** amongst employees. The federal government has a work-sharing program that allows employees to also collect EI while working reduced hours.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/notices/coronavirus.html>
 - ii. Allowing employees to **voluntarily** use banked vacation / OT / sick or personal leave days (this must be at the employee's discretion, ie voluntary) before being laid off
 - iii. **Temporary layoffs** so that employees can collect EI. The following link provides a summary across the Canadian jurisdictions regarding temporary layoff durations.

<https://hrinsider.ca/around-the-provinces-temporary-layoff-rules-across-canada/>

Important things to know about temporary layoffs:

- Pay close attention to the limits in your province / territory. Layoffs that exceed the temporary layoff term can become terminations and you may be required to pay termination pay to employees, and, where applicable, possibly severance pay.
- Check employment contracts as there is a risk of constructive dismissal where temporary layoffs were not expressly identified in the contract. If there is no contractual right to temporarily layoff an employee, consider speaking with the employee beforehand and document in writing any agreements made.
- Although not usually obligated to maintain benefits during a temporary layoff (an employer should confirm its obligations based on the provincial/territorial employment legislation, employment contracts, employee policies), it is generally a good idea to do so as long as the employee makes his/her co-payments (if there are any).
- A Record of Employment must be prepared for employees to receive Employment Insurance benefits. Verify that you have current employee contact information.
- Communicate a temporary layoff decision to the employee in writing, including specifying their portion of the benefits premiums if they wish to maintain their benefits. Ensure the employee understands the risks of not maintaining benefits.
- If in doubt its always wise to consult with an employment lawyer first.