



The Return to Office:

How to Prepare Your Operations and Facilities

For the foreseeable future, there will be no return to the old normal. But many agencies are looking to return staff to the office, at least in a limited capacity, in the months ahead. The time to begin planning for that is now. The following worksheet guides you through a four-step planning process for adapting your operations and provides a series of checklists to help you prepare your facilities.

Four Steps for Data-Driven Operational Adaptations

Step One: Establish a Baseline for Operations and Facilities

What services are essential to daily operations and what are the baseline requirements for delivering those services?

| Service | People | Facilities | Equipment |
|---------|--------|------------|-----------|
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Step Two: Assess Operations Performance

Having baseline information allows you to assess how your facilities and operations have performed historically, and then set benchmarks for the future. For each of the services listed above, identify the following key metrics, based on past performance:

| Service | Workload | Staffing Levels | Project Funding | Delivery |
|---------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|
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Step Three: Model Potential Scenarios

With a list of current services, their associated data and benchmarks of past performance, your organization can begin modeling different scenarios and comparing your options. This will help you predict expenses and have the financial influence to execute your adaptations when the time comes.

Step Four: Balanced Decision-making

Balanced decision-making can be impacted by three factors: timing, availability of information and communication. Here are some points to remember:

- The time to communicate any changes to or deviations from a strategy is in the **planning phase when changes are the cheapest**.
- By understanding **current market conditions and leveraging critical data points** in the planning process, consequences can be reduced and perhaps prevented altogether.
- **A decision cannot be made without input from staff**. Hearing the experiences and concerns of the people directly affected by the plans only strengthens the decision-making process.

Return-to-Office: A Snapshot

When you and your team return to the office, it will likely look very different. Here are some of the areas where changes might be made:

Social Distancing

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends keeping at least six feet of space between people. In reviewing your team's office space, ask yourself:

- Are any transparent shields or other physical dividers needed to maintain a safe social distance between employees or visitors when social distancing is not an option?
- When dividers are not possible, would signs, tape marks or other visual cues (decals, colored tape on the floor) make it easier for people to social distance?
- Does the current "people flow" meet the social distance guidelines set for your state and industry, or is a new one required to reduce the risk of contamination?

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Clear and thorough cleaning and disinfecting guidelines for every room will be necessary for re-opening safely. Here are a few other items to consider when moving back into the workspace.

- Do you follow [CDC's recommendations](#) for cleaning soft surfaces, such as couches, carpets and laundry?
- Do you possess the Environmental Protection Agency's list of [approved disinfectants](#) for decontaminating surfaces?
- Does staff need training in cleaning and handling chemical cleaners to help reduce exposure to COVID-19?

Entrances and Common Areas

Additionally, might the following office fixtures be changed or removed to create a safer environment?

- Counters
- Tables
- Walls
- Common surfaces, including:
 - › Flooring
 - › Seating
 - › Tables
 - › Hallways
 - › Counters
- Doorknobs (for entrances, exits and other high traffic areas)
- Light switches
- Common and shared spaces, like:
 - › Offices
 - › Lobbies and waiting areas
 - › Labs
 - › Conference rooms and training areas, etc.



Employee Well-Being

Adhering to strict worker safety standards will go a long way to preventing viral spread. Procure the personal protective equipment (PPE) listed below and make it available to the proper staff:

Cleaning & Maintenance Staff PPE

- Face masks (N95 or higher face masks; and follow any Federal, state and local guidelines)
- Safety glasses/goggles
- Disposable gloves
- Protective body coverings, when needed

Non-Cleaning PPE

- Face masks (determine level needed based off position and interaction with people, and follow any Federal, state and local guidelines)
- Safety glasses/goggles
- Disposable gloves
- Body coverings
- Dividers

COVID-19 Mitigation in the Workplace: An FAQ

Earlier this year, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) answered frequently asked questions related to COVID-19 and workplace, with a focus on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Here are some key issues the agency highlighted:

May an employer encourage employees to telework (i.e., work from an alternative location such as home) as an infection-control strategy during a pandemic?

Yes. Telework is an effective infection-control strategy that is also familiar to ADA-covered employers as a reasonable accommodation. In addition, employees with disabilities that put them at high risk for complications of pandemic influenza may request telework as a reasonable accommodation to reduce their chances of infection during a pandemic.

During a pandemic, may an employer require its employees to adopt infection-control practices, such as regular hand washing, at the workplace?

Yes. Requiring infection control practices, such as regular hand washing, coughing and sneezing etiquette, and proper tissue usage and disposal, does not implicate the ADA.

During a pandemic, may an employer require its employees to wear personal protective equipment (e.g., face masks, gloves, or gowns) designed to reduce the transmission of pandemic infection?

Yes. An employer may require employees to wear personal protective equipment during a pandemic. However, where an employee with a disability needs a related reasonable accommodation under the ADA (e.g., non-latex gloves, or gowns designed for individuals who use wheelchairs), the employer should provide these, absent undue hardship.

During a pandemic, must an employer continue to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with known disabilities that are unrelated to the pandemic, barring undue hardship?

Yes. An employer's ADA responsibilities to individuals with disabilities continue during an influenza pandemic. Only when an employer can demonstrate that a person with a disability poses a direct threat, even after reasonable accommodation, can it lawfully exclude him from employment or employment-related activities.



The Return to Office: A Manager's Perspective

Team managers are likely to find that the return to the office has an important psychological dimension. In a recent post, a GovLoop blogger suggested four best practices for easing the transition.

- **Celebrate the successes your team delivered while working remotely.** As you take the first steps in returning to more “normal” ways of working, make a commitment to publicly celebrating the individual and collective successes of your team.
- **Extend an extra measure of grace.** Expecting everyone to step right back into a normal mode of operation isn't realistic. Plan ahead for uneven performance, reduced productivity, or unexpected absences from work.
- **Recognize there may be guilt or sadness.** For example, some employees may feel guilty about leaving the care of children or others family members to someone else. You need to be prepared to deal with these negative emotions and their impact on your work.
- **Don't just go back to normal.** The return to work process provides you with an unprecedented opportunity to create new team norms and drive new ways of working. In thinking about the old work patterns, talk with your team about what worked, what didn't and what you can learn from the experience.

Communicating Your Plan

Here are key points to remember about effective communications:

- Make staff aware of cleaning and decontaminating changes
- Create flowcharts of escalation protocols
- Have a contingency plan for letting your staff know (and responding to press inquiries) about a COVID-19 occurrence or outbreak in your facility



How Gordian Can Help

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Learn more about how Job Order Contracting can help you modify your facilities so they are ready to re-open at gordian.com/joc.

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