

A MINI CASE STUDY

We've Virtualized Our Workforce—Now What?

Client Demographics

Nonprofit HR Practice Area: HR Outsourcing

Location: Ashburn, Virginia

Sector: Nonprofit

Mission Type: Public Parks Advocacy

Staff Size: 61 Full-Time Employees

Annual Budget: \$19 Million

Scenario

A Virginia-based public parks advocacy organization considered whether or not they could transition to become a fully remote workforce. However, COVID-19 expedited that process. The organization performed an analysis pre-COVID because they wanted to expand recruitment nationwide. Recruiting nationally meant the organization avoided relocation costs, but had to allow new fully remote staff members to work from wherever they resided. The organization was already allowing telework three days a week for those who chose to do so; others went into the office every day. The analysis showed that 95% of their positions could be completely remote, and the 5% that could not be remote were related to either maintenance of the building or operations where staff preferred to be in office.

Considerations

In this rapid shift, the organization needed to adapt to a new normal and the following measures were taken into account as they transitioned.

- 1 Ensuring staff had access to resources to create a productive work-from-home environment.
- 2 Encouraging employees to practice healthy work-life balance and take time to disconnect and recharge.
- 3 Establishing virtual employee engagement activities to maintain social connection.
- 4 Evaluating the financial implications and potential cost savings for the organization as well as individual employees.
- 5 Viewing old resources, such as an office building, as an opportunity to generate new, creative solutions.

Solutions

In terms of implementation and maintenance of the new normal, there were challenges regarding expectations and priorities. The organization lost 5% of their workforce because certain employees did not enjoy working from home, or they had other priorities competing for their focus, such as family commitments. Additionally, not all the engagement initiatives stuck. However, the organization implemented a number of successful solutions regarding each of the previous considerations.

First, the organization created a \$200 stipend for staff and new hires to set up home offices. Staff were also provided a \$25 biweekly technology stipend for any additional technology enhancements to create an efficient work-from-home environment. Additionally, the organization's IT team was already setup to conduct training opportunities to familiarize staff with the new virtual platforms.

The second solution included initiatives to actively promote work-life balance. While employees initially struggled disconnecting, leadership encouraged staff to take daily walks and shut off their computers at a specific time. They also allowed for flexible response times to email, as well as encouraged open dialogue about concerns and other schedule accommodations.

Additionally, the organization offered mental health resources through their EAP and created virtual connection opportunities through a book club and a 90-minute open office session with the CEO. Separate departments hosted virtual lunches and implemented a newsletter with personal (e.g., birthdays, proposals, etc.) and business updates. As a result, employee engagement increased.

Lastly, the organization required a reduction in force (RIF) for 10 employees to maintain organizational operations, as there were no cost savings in the transition to virtual work. However, there were significant cost savings for employees no longer commuting to a physical workspace. The organization owned their headquarters building and without employees coming in every day, leadership intend to repurpose that space.

In conclusion, the Nonprofit HR client was able to successfully shift to a fully remote workforce, even the 5% that they initially identified as not being able to work remotely. With a fully remote workforce, they could have equity for all positions. The organization continued to host monthly all staff meetings virtually, incorporated one-on-one online group activities and utilized Microsoft Teams. Productivity of staff working from home remained the same as when they were working in the office, however, check-ins increased. Overall, staff was happy with the virtualization.

Recap & Reflect

Walk through this scenario in your organization by reflecting on the following questions.

- 1 What specific resources would staff in your organization need to work from home effectively? In addition to equipment, consider technology training for new virtual programs.
- 2 What parameters can you establish to ensure that employees practice healthy boundaries between work and personal life?
- 3 What type of virtual engagement initiatives would be most valuable to staff at your organization?
- 4 What are the financial implications in shifting to fully virtual work? Consider both for the organization as a whole and individual employees.
- 5 What assets or resources does your organization already possess that can be leveraged to serve the future needs of the organization?
- 6 How can your organization use data to drive decision making?



Final Point to Ponder

Looking ahead, are your solutions agile? Do they allow your organization to pivot quickly and respond to the unexpected?

