

Nonprofit Return to Workplace Pulse Survey Results Overview

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

NONPROFIT RETURN TO WORKPLACE PULSE SURVEY RESULTS OVERVIEW

With over 300 million COVID-19 vaccinations administered, many organizations that transitioned to virtual and in-home workspaces are beginning to return their daily operations to physical workplaces. Each organization's plans to safely return employees to physical workplaces are unique to their needs, mission and geography. Tune in to this recording of the Return to Workplace Pulse Survey Overview webinar during which we will explore the findings of this survey.

You will walk away with insights on:

- Primary reasons why organizations decided to return to the workplace
- Critical organizational concerns on maintaining or planning to implement a partially virtual workforce strategy
- Safety parameters organizations did, or will, implement to support return-to-workplace plans
- How successful remote work has been for organizations, lessons learned and unexpected positive outcomes

SPEAKER



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Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hello, everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR's Learning Educational Event. Today's session is entitled Nonprofit Return to Workplace Pulse Survey Results Overview. My name is Atokatha Ashmond Brew, I'm Managing Director of Client Marketing & Strategic Communication for Nonprofit HR. I will be your conversation moderator for today. We have a lot of great content to cover. You're going to walk away with a solid understanding of how nonprofits responded to our recent survey about their return-to-workplace plans and perspectives on what worked and didn't work so well during their work-from-home planning and experiences.

Before we get started, though, I would like to go over a few items, so you know how to participate in today's event. You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default. If you would prefer to join over the phone, just select telephone in the audio pane and the dial-in information will be displayed.

You will have the opportunity to submit text questions to today's presenter by typing your questions into the questions pane on the control panel. You may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We'll get to some of those questions throughout the presentation, and we'll have a final Q&A at the end of this event.

Today's event is being recorded, and you'll receive a follow-up email within a few days with a link to view the recording and the slides from this presentation. Along with those assets, live attendees will also receive codes for SHRM and HRCI recertification.

And now, a little bit about Nonprofit HR's founder and CEO, Lisa Brown Alexander. Lisa's leadership and the work of the firm have proven that better talent management practices can play an integral role in nonprofit success. Nonprofits have benefited from wealth of knowledge and experience to make their people-driven initiatives successful. Lisa's goal is to ensure that every Nonprofit HR engagement inspires social sector leaders to strengthen their most important asset, their people. Over the course of her career, Lisa has presented to hundreds of national, international and local organizations, staff and leadership teams covering all things talent management for the social sector. And for those who did not know, Lisa and her husband are also the proud owners of Wellspring Manor & Spa, a full-service bed and breakfast located in suburban Maryland.

And now, without further ado, I turn it over to you, Lisa.

Lisa Brown Alexander: Great. Thank you so much, Atokatha, and good afternoon to everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today as we delve into this very important topic of return to work, which is foremost on everyone's minds right now. Atokatha shared some information about me. I'll share a little bit of information about Nonprofit HR.

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Hopefully, many of you are familiar with us. We've been serving the social sector for more than 20 years now, serving as a trusted advisor and thought partner around all things talent management. We are based in Washington, D.C., but have staff and clients around the country, and we're just thrilled to present today's presentation.

Our work covers five core practice areas, as shown on screen. So, if there's anything that you want to talk about after today's session, feel free to reach out. Our services really cover the full talent management lifecycle. Now, let's jump into today's presentation.

We're going to talk about a number of things today, not necessarily in this order, but we certainly will be covering the future of work that we see as a hybrid workplace; some important things to consider as you contemplate returning to work with respect to safety; and then, we're going to talk about some general considerations that you'll want to think about that are not necessarily safety related, but certainly important to contemplate as your organization moves back into the physical workspace.

If you haven't done so already, we invite you to download the results of our Nonprofit Return to Workplace Pulse Survey Report by visiting us at nonprofithr.com/2021rtws.

All right, let's get started.

As a quick overview, we got a very robust response from survey respondents, and we're glad to have 635 organizations respond from across the country. We also have some participants from Canada and Australia, as really every country right now is contemplating and grappling with this return-to-work issue. We're delighted to have such a strong response. Organizations really covered the gamut of the sector in terms of size and location, so we believe that the results from this survey are a representative sample of what organizations are contending with.

What we learned is as a result of the pandemic, some 70% of employees representing the respondent pool were working from home, primarily from home. Now, we know that many nonprofit organizations are direct service or direct care organizations. And as you'll note on screen, 50% of those organizations have most of their employees working from home, versus 87% of those organizations that don't classify themselves as a direct service organization. We also saw a decent representation, particularly within direct service organizations, of 37% who were already embracing a kind of hybrid model, spending some time at the workplace and some time at home.

What we also learned was that organizations were, in many instances, pleasantly surprised with the success rate of what was a huge remote work experiment. Many of us around mid-March felt ourselves fleeing to our homes, not really sure how long this work from home arrangement would go on for. And here we are, in many instances, a year and almost a half later, and many of us are still working from home.

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The good news is that the majority of organizations, 62%, deemed their remote work exercise or experiment as successful, which is really encouraging, especially because so many organizations were hesitant to move to either a hybrid arrangement or a virtual arrangement prior to the pandemic. But what many organizations learned, 62% of them, was that it really went quite well. Obviously, those organizations that classify themselves as direct service organizations had fewer employees working remotely, and I think it's important to point out—that recognition that virtual work can work has really come through as a theme through this survey.

What we heard from organizations was that they experienced a number of unanticipated positive benefits resulting from moving to either a remote work environment or a hybrid work model. One of the most significant, unexpected benefits was improvement in the use of available technology. Some organizations actually invested in new technology, but many just made better use of the technology they already have. And so, we thought that was really interesting, particularly as some organizations use the basis for not moving to a virtual environment, they use technology as the reason for that, not having the right or enough technology.

We also heard that many organizations realized greater productivity by their staff. Others saw expansions in their services and a wider footprint of people they were able to support—so, many, many positive outcomes from moving to a virtual environment.

We also noted a number of organizations saw improvements not only in productivity, but in employee engagement, and the leveling of the playing field between those who previously worked in the office, versus those who were virtual, and kind of the platform or the playing field is level now between those two sets of employees.

This is just a quick snapshot of some of the words that you used, those of you who participated in the survey, and other respondents used to describe the positive benefits of moving to hybrid workplace. So you'll see increased productivity, working streamlined, of course, the commute was completely eliminated for so many, better realization of work-life balance—that is a controversial area and we'll delve into that in just a little bit.

What we found was that as a result of COVID-19 and the kind of migration to our homes, many organizations are now contemplating remote work on a going forward and a sustained basis. As a matter of fact, what we heard was some 51% of organizations are now contemplating allowing staff to work remotely wherever their positions allow it. What a change, because prior where there were so many organizations resistant to moving in this direction, but COVID forced us to embrace virtual work. And many organizations have realized, as I've mentioned already, that this has worked in their favor.

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We also noted that a portion of organizations are going to allow their staff to continue working from home as they did before the pandemic, so they were already embracing virtual work. Then, of course, we also have 14% of organizations saying, “No, we're not embracing virtual work,” and everyone is expected to return to the workplace at some point in the near future.

Here are just a couple of other key data points from the survey that I think are important and then we'll talk about the implications.

What we also heard from survey respondents is that a number of organizations saw their employees relocate from where they were prior to the pandemic to entirely different places. In some instances, those employees shared those decisions with their employers. In other instances, they did not. And so, you might be thinking to yourself, am I paying employment taxes or employer taxes for an individual who maybe used to work in New York and now is in Texas? That's quite possible.

Of those organizations that participated in the survey, we saw 48% of organizations see up to 25% of their staff change their home address during the crisis. Many people did it to support family. Others did it because they were living in a high-cost environment and really could not sustain the cost of living in their current arrangement.

This is just an interesting note that we found from a study from LinkedIn. LinkedIn did a similar survey last year, and now, I know it feels like a lifetime ago, but between April and June of 2020, LinkedIn asked hundreds of thousands of people across the country, and beyond actually, which of the following best describes their attitudes toward working from home. And what you'll see here is that a good number of people wanted to be able to continue working from home after the crisis was over. Now, this was last year. We weren't able to find the refreshing of this data, but I would imagine the answers haven't really changed significantly.

There's also a healthy mix of people who want to have the option to work from home and also work from the workplace, the physical workplace. And then, of course, there's another percentage of folks, 35% of folks, in June of 2020 said that they want to get back to the office. So, it's a mixed bag.

I would imagine that if you ask your own staff this same question, the responses that you would receive would be very similar, right? So, some folks would want to keep working from home. Others are comfortable coming back into the workplace, but not on a full-time basis. And others are desperate to change their environment or perhaps are in situations or circumstances where working from home is not conducive.

So, before we move into our insights, let me just pause to see if we have any questions or comments from any of you in the audience today. Atokatha?

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Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hi Lisa. Nope, there are no questions so far.

Lisa Brown Alexander: OK. No problem. Let's keep going. We've got a lot to cover today.

One of the biggest insights that we took from the survey and from our work with hundreds of nonprofits across the country is that hybrid work is really the future of work. This is not a temporary trend, and we're expecting that more and more organizations will recognize that their operations can continue, either in a hybrid work environment or a fully virtual work environment.

Now, certainly, those of you who are providing direct services to the community, being a fully virtual organization is not likely the answer for you. But more and more, what we're hearing from organizations is a recognition that a hybrid work environment, meaning a combination of working from home and working from the workplace, is where they're moving toward in the future.

What we also know from the literature and the research is that hybrid work success is defined by things like productivity, the extent to which employees remain engaged, and the extent to which stakeholders and customers, or clients or however you refer to the community that you serve, remain satisfied with the services that you're providing and the quality of support that they're receiving.

Things like camaraderie, comfort, control, which is the important to a lot of employers, and commutes are all hallmarks of our pre-COVID workplace. But things have really shifted and evolved. What we are seeing is kind of a grab bag of control by leadership in many organizations to push people back into the workplace. And that is, right now, looking like a little bit of a mixed situation.

In terms of commutes, certainly, I don't think anyone is missing their commute. We're here in the Washington, D.C., area. I know I've spent an average of an hour getting to work to and from work each day, and I don't miss it. I really don't miss it, and I know a number of people don't miss it either.

Certainly, for direct service organizations, of which many of you are representing on today's call, considering your physical workplace as a place of collaboration, versus solely a place to work, is something that we're beginning to see happen. Organizations are looking at the physical workplace differently than they did before.

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We're also seeing a shift from kind of a place-constrained or a location-driven approach to work to organizations being placed unconstrained, meaning being able to work anywhere, anytime that employees choose. Now, we recognize that is kind of on the opposite end of the spectrum. But, more and more organizations have come to realize through COVID and through the physical relocation of their employees into multiple time zones, and sometimes even out of the country, that this can actually work. And so, more and more organizations are recognizing the need to shift, particularly those that are non-direct service organizations.

Here are just a couple of other insights with respect to hybrid workplace and return to work. What we're also understanding and hearing loudly, and clearly, is that those in today's workforce are looking for organizations that are not only purposeful and productive, but especially agile and flexible. The conversation about flexibility is showing up in the very first interview that many organizations are having with prospective employees. Do you allow work from home? Will you require me to return to the workplace when the rest of your staff do? Those are key questions. And so, if you are in an environment or a situation where you can have some agility and flexibility, we're seeing that as a really good way to go.

The pandemic has also really influenced organizations to understand the need to be more human focused, meaning being compassionate, empathetic and understanding of the many and diverse challenges that employees have had navigating through this pandemic. And so, the organizations that understand the need to be human focused and to allow people's humanity to show up during this time are the ones that are coming out ahead.

Then, of course, what we're observing is that organizations that are successful and have already become to be successful as it relates to the hybrid workplace are doing so because they recognize that they have to balance their needs as an organization with the needs of their staff.

So why does any of this matter? Well, there are a couple of reasons.

First of all, folks are looking at work very differently.

The crisis, the pandemic, has allowed folks to kind of step back and re-evaluate their careers, their priorities and what's important to them in the middle of this chaos, right? What we're finding is talent are really demanding a different relationship with their employers. They want to have better balance, better integration, better rhythm. They're wanting to spend more time with their families. Many people have spent more time with their families in the last year and a half that they have in the last 10. We're hearing that over and over from individuals, even from leaders who've recognized their families all over again, right?

So, because of that, this hybrid workplace dynamic is not one that you can ignore. Your staff will continue, if they haven't already, to press you and push the envelope on how far they want you to go with respect to hybrid work. And so, having a thoughtful approach to hybrid work is really going to be critical, not only to retain the people that you have, but to attract new talent.

We also think that this hybrid workplace discussion is important because organizations that have not embraced agility and flexibility over the last year, year and a half, really have found themselves falling behind—not just from a talent perspective, but programmatically. We've seen organizations close their doors, either because they haven't been able to sustain themselves from a financial perspective or others who have not been able to be agile from a programmatic perspective. And then, we certainly have seen organizations lose talent where they've not embraced flexibility.

So, we know that not embracing these elements, including employee well-being, will cause an organization to lag. Those organizations that are talent oblivious, meaning that HR and talent is just something that is not a priority for them, we know that those organizations are going to continue to see a negative impact, not only from a program perspective, but in terms of outcomes and results. Why? Because those organizations will be challenged with attracting top talent to their organizations. And we know that programs are fueled by high-performing talent. And so, if you're not able to attract that talent, if your organization is kind of operating as a talent oblivious organization, over time, we're anticipating negative impact on those organizations beyond just being able to find and keep people.

Conversely, those organizations that are talent focused, those that understand that their mission and vision and outcomes are fueled and driven by being able to attract top talent, those organizations are not only going to continue to advance and progress their mission, but they're also going to be able to strengthen their employer brand. Why? Because their employees are going to feel good about the concessions and the flexibility that's been afforded to them. They're going to understand that they matter to their employers. That will, in turn, stimulate positive vibes and feedback about the employer, and find itself in how the employer brand is shaped.

It's a lot. This is not just about coming into the workplace. This is about the decisions that you're making right now as an organization to either remain hybrid, to be fully in office, or fully remote, and the implications for those decisions on your talent practices.

Let me go back here for a second. I'm going to pause again to see if we have any questions, comments or for feedback.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yes, Lisa, we do have one question, and it is somewhat of a statement, but I think you can find the question in it.

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Our employees are asking for more flexibility. They want to be in the office less. We are already have a three-day in the office policy, but there's still more resistance. It's been difficult for us to plan with no buy-in. What would you advise?

Lisa Brown Alexander: I would advise embracing workplace flexibility, perhaps a little bit more than you have.

So, ask yourself the question, what's the why behind the three days a week?

Is there's something strategically aligned in those three days? What is what is causing three days to be the magic number? What would happen if you moved two? And would you get the buy-in that you're looking for and therefore, get the engagement and the productivity that you likely need to be successful?

If that's the case, and you can test that by asking questions of your staff, if that's the case, would shifting from three days to two days get you the return that you need? And that's a question that I would encourage you to ask of leadership and of staff, right? Why is three days the magical number? What about that is necessary for your organization to be successful? And can you foster that sense of community and collaboration using virtual tools that are available in the marketplace today?

So that would be my response to that question.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Do you want to take one more now?

Lisa Brown Alexander: We can take one more now.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: All right.

I am part of a staff committee that's being converted to support the development of policies and procedures for returning. I would be interested in recommendations for how a group like this could and should be used for developing the re-opening strategy.

Lisa Brown Alexander: Well, if that group is representative of your workforce—meaning including new people, longer-term people, people from programs, people from operations, people who are young and old and married and single, with children and without—if that workgroup represents the full spectrum of your staff, I would say that you have a good window into what can work and what can't.

And so, I would say, encourage your leadership to leverage you as a group to really inform what staff need and want, so that the policies and decisions that are made are not off base. Right?

If we're not listening to our staff right now, and the people who fuel our organization, and we implement policies and procedures that are off base, we're going to feel the immediate effects of that. Folks have choices, and we'll talk about that in a second, and as a result of having those choices, they will simply opt to move on. And that moving on could mean moving into a kind of a gig role or simply choosing another nonprofit that is affording them the level of flexibility that they otherwise don't have. So, that would be my advice there.

All right, let's keep going.

There are a couple of models that we're seeing emerge as we think about the hybrid workplace. Essentially, all of our organizations are going to fall into one of these three buckets.

One is the remote-first model, which means everyone is fully remote, spread across, potentially, multiple time zones and maybe even multiple countries, although, that brings a challenge of its own. And the primary default is through the virtual communication, much like we're doing today.

Our organization, Nonprofit HR, has moved to a remote-first or fully remote environment. We've got a small satellite office in Washington, D.C., but most of us for the last year and a half have been working from home almost entirely, so that's where we fall.

There are other organizations that are having more of an office-occasional or traditionally hybrid working environment, where they're blending in-person collaboration with individuals' solo work on a virtual basis. They've got a designated physical space, but they're using that space in a different way than they used before, opening things up to be more flexible, to be more agile. Some are even completely reconstructing their physical space to support diverse work styles, using things like pods and open spaces, and kind of the phone booth approach to give folks privacy when they do come to the office. But that's the office-occasional hybrid model.

And then, of course, there's the traditional office-first model, where remote work is going to be allowed on a going-forward basis only under very limited circumstances, such as, you can work from home, but only one day a week, and it can't be a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, for example.

Many office-first organizations, or workplace-first organizations because we recognize everyone doesn't work from an office, are organizations that are more traditional from a culture perspective. They may have leadership that are resistant to embracing a hybrid workplace on a longer-term basis and saw what happened over the last 15 months really as a necessary evil. For folks who work in those office-first environments, the remote staff in those environments are often seen as outliers, right? So, they're the exception to the rule, not the rule itself.

There are some other important considerations that we think you should contemplate as you consider which of these buckets your organization will eventually fall into.

The first and foremost, is the nature of the work that you do. If you're an arts organization or a presenting organization, a dance company, a theater, obviously being a fully remote organization may or may not work for your organization. If you're offering services to the homeless or you are in the human services space, for example, being a fully remote organization likely will not work, because the nature of the work that you do requires some physical presence, right? But that doesn't mean you can't embrace some measure of flexibility or that you can't allow for some measure of virtual support at some level. But that really needs to be determined by your organization in a way that works for you.

You also want to look at the demographics of your staff—age, child status, physical location; look across your demographics and understand that as you contemplate whether or not you stay remote or become an office-first organization. How will that land with the people who work with you? What are your experience levels for working in a remote environment? If you've got staff, for example, who are experienced in their careers and have had challenges embracing technology, does it make sense for your organization, on a long-term basis, to remain remote?

Conversely, if you've got kind of a ton of young folks and I'm generalizing, please recognize that, I'm generalizing for the purpose of this discussion. But folks who are kind of digital natives, then being a fully remote work environment could very well work for your organization.

One of the other things to contemplate is, where will your leadership work? And that's a question you want to answer because if your leadership is driving for being in the physical workplace, pushing to be fully remote is going to create conflict. And you'll need to explore the why behind that with your own leadership team, but it will create conflict. So, understand where your leadership believes they should be working, because that is likely going to inform where they think everyone else should work.

In terms of how remote employees be recognized and rewarded in theme, if you're a fully remote environment, that's something you'll want to consider. And then finally, can you maintain a strong and effective organizational culture? If you are fully remote, hybrid or office first, what will work best for your organization? These are all things that you may not have been thinking about, you may be thinking about things like PPE and socially distancing and taking temperature checks when people come into the office. But there are a number of other considerations that we think are important.

Finally, as you contemplate your organization's environment, are you ready to be a WFA, or work-from-anywhere, culture? Increasingly, organizations are realizing that they potentially can be, but there are all kinds of considerations and things that you'll want to contemplate. Not the least of which is the issue around taxes. And so, consult with your tax accountant, have them guide you or your financial folks, your director of finance, have them guide you around this issue. There's a lot of emerging best practice coming from COVID and how employees are treated based on where they work versus where they live. You may be hesitant to need to stand up employer tax accounts from the various jurisdictions where your folks are living, but if you are going to be a work-from-anywhere environment, those are some of the things that you'll want to consider.

Now, one of the upsides of being a work-from-anywhere culture or a fully remote workplace is that you gain access to a much larger talent pool. Now, that comes with positives and negatives, having a larger pool means you may have larger groups of applicants applying to your vacancies, and if you don't have the infrastructure to support that, that can, of course, create a challenge.

But, having access to and responses from a larger talent pool, in many instances, can bring your organization the diversity that maybe it can't get based on your physical location, right? So, that's just something to contemplate. You open yourself up to many more possible employees if you list your location on your employment as anywhere you choose. And we started to use that at Nonprofit HR, and it's working quite well for us, but we're a fully virtual environment.

You'll also want to examine, some of the norms and values and assumptions about what's important in your organization. Have a conversation before you make the decision to go fully virtual about values in and habits and norms that are embraced in your organization, and how they will change if you remain virtual on longer-term basis.

In terms of location-centric pay practices, many organizations that are multi-state employers are kind of having to look at their compensation practices within a brand-new way, right? So, for example, if you had employees in California, Mississippi and Maine and had paid practices that were location centric and you move to a work-from-anywhere environment, you'll want to decide which locale will serve as the basis for your pay practices. Where will you benchmark? What market will you use as the foundational market for your organization? That's something that some organizations have not yet contemplated, but if you're going to move in this direction, that's something that you're going to need to examine if you have a location-centric pay practice or strategy.

In terms of considering remote-friendly benefits, everything from reimbursement for at-home equipment to different supports for the physical being working in the workplace, those are all things that you'll want to consider. You'll also want to look at your health insurance plan. If you're contemplating moving to a work-from-anywhere environment, make sure that your health insurance plan is not location specific, but can support your organization regardless of where staff may be. And that can be a particular challenge for smaller nonprofits, where there's not some sort of access to a broad range of benefit offerings and health insurance plans.

You certainly will also want to contemplate any changes in how you administer workforce learning with a particular emphasis on relationship-building skills. Some of us are really good virtually, and others are not. And so, you can anticipate that if you're going to move to a work-from-anywhere culture that you may need to strengthen, particularly among your supervisors, relationship-building skills and the ability to manage hybrid teams. And then finally, last but certainly not least, understand the need for psychological safety that employees have when they're virtual, feeling connected and having a sense of belonging to the people that they call colleagues. These are all things that you'll want to consider as you contemplate whether or not this is the right move for your organization.

In terms of action steps, things that you can take now as you look at your hybrid work environment, if that's where you're inclined to go, first and foremost, I think it's critical that you drive your leadership to buy in to workplace flexibility. If you are in an organization where your CEO, your board or your leadership team are kind of digging their heels in and resisting and requiring everyone to come back to the physical workplace, particularly if you're not a direct service organization, that's really where you need to start. Encouraging and driving leadership to understand that flexibility is not just the hot trend that's going to go away. It has become an expectation. And, again, because staff have choices about where they put their time and talent, you're really going to need to encourage your leadership to embrace some measure of flexibility in the workplace.

You'll also want to be clear about your expectations for what remote work looks like, right? And so, does that mean everyone has to be in the office on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? Then, Monday and Friday are remote days? Does that mean that people can choose whichever day they want, but they can only work remotely two or three days a week? All those things need to be made clear and be communicated to your staff, so that they understand what the rules are.

We also want to encourage you to look at your policies and practices through an equity lens. So, if that means engaging the support of a DEI consultant who can help inform your decisions and help you make decisions that support equity, inclusion and belonging, then we certainly encourage you to do that. Another way to ensure that you're at least getting diverse perspectives is to engage that representative body of staff to help shape any changes that you're going to make in your strategies, policies and practices.

Again, keeping with the idea that workplace flexibility is kind of central to what organizations and employees are needing right now, we encourage you to look at all of your policies and practices, and ask the question, why? And, why not?

So, if you've established, for example, that staff can only work from home one day a week—why? Or why not, right? Ask that question of yourself and of every new policy you put in place going forward. What is the basis of making this decision that you have made? In many instances, you've said, and this is going back to the data, that remote work or at least some measure of it has been successful for your organization. So, if you're a site to go back to pre-COVID times to a more rigid or more structured or more confined approach to workplace flexibility, you really need to ask yourself, why? What are you gaining from doing that, and what will you not gain, or lose? What would you lose if you don't embrace a more flexible approach? That's more of a qualitative conversation that you'll need to have within your organization.

It will also be important, particularly if you're a learning organization or consider yourself to be a learning organization, to implement training on leading and working virtually. We've been forced to work virtually in many instances, but some folks are still struggling with it. And so, you may want to contemplate implementing some sort of formal training, particularly if you're going to embrace a hybrid workplace arrangement on a long-term basis. Provide some training to leadership and to staff on how to do it well and how to work together with colleagues virtually on a long-term basis, if that's where you decide you want to go.

We've already talked about location-driven compensation models. You'll certainly want to take a look at that to see how your organization could potentially be effected. As an example, if you are embracing a hybrid approach, considering a mix of collaboration days versus quiet days may be a nice way to describe it, rather than you can only work from home two days a week. Perhaps you designate Tuesdays and Fridays with collaboration days, and Mondays and Wednesdays as quiet days. Doesn't that sound better than saying that you can only work from home two or three days a week? So, just consider you brand it. You may need to sell it, not only to leadership but to the staff. And so, we think that the collaboration and quiet days is a nice way to frame a hybrid work environment.

Consider reconfiguring your physical spaces, as I mentioned before. Many organizations have used this time where folks are not in the office to think about the physical environment to the extent that it is feasible, recognizing that for many, it may be cost prohibitive or just not conducive to the nature of your work. But, if it is, consider a mix of spaces: huddle rooms, pods, private office booths, open spaces for collaboration, spaces that support quiet work. Those are all things that if you have the resources and the wherewithal to do that, we're seeing organizations, particularly in the for-profit space, move to this kind of physical environment.

Finally, encouraging the alternation between in-person meetings and virtual meetings, particularly if you're going to be a mixed organization or a hybrid organization in terms of returning to work. And so, these are just some of the things that we'd like to recommend alternating between, having people come in to meet in person. And there's a lot of value to looking across the table at someone, and we all know that and many of us miss it. But there's also value in allowing some measure of flexibility for virtual meetings to continue even if you return to your physical space.

I'm going to pause and see if we have any questions or comments before continuing. Atokatha?

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yes, we do have a question and it is: The success of virtual work during the pandemic was built on the bedrock of relationships that were formed in person. As organizations turn over their staff and are in and out, especially those that have been with the organization for long periods of time, do you foresee obstacles and challenges as new employees are onboarded into an environment where they haven't had the opportunity to build those face-to-face relationships?

Lisa Brown Alexander: That's an excellent question. Excellent question, and one that I think is very real. I would say the answer to that is, be intentional about how you onboard and create a sense of belonging for your virtual employees, or those employees who join the organization post-COVID or in the middle of COVID and have not had the opportunity to physically meet their colleagues. That means creating spaces, virtual and soon-to-be in person, for folks to come together and get to know each other. Carving out an intentional space and time to allow for the fostering of relationships.

At Nonprofit HR, for example, when we host our all staff meetings, we've made time for play and of light banter to allow folks to get to know their colleagues in a more relaxed setting. And so, everything from breakout groups around topics of interest and common topics to setting up one-on-ones with people who otherwise wouldn't normally work together, are all things that you can do to support relationship building.

But, you have to do it on purpose. It will not happen organically. And it's much more likely that employees who started with your organization in the midst of the pandemic and have never met their colleagues may feel a sense of isolation. And so, you'll want to particularly reach out to those folks, talk to them on a regular basis, engage them virtually, create physical space for them to connect with others wherever possible.

Any other questions?

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yes, there's another question that's regarding cost for employees and what they are incurring.

How are organizations dealing with those who return to work while others are still home and those employees who are returning to work absorbing commuting costs that others who are working from home are not absorbing or experiencing? Do you compensate them more? Do you give them some sort of reimbursement for those costs that other employees are not experiencing?

Lisa Brown Alexander: You certainly can, and doing that would certainly be an equitable thing to do, right? Because either they're choosing to or they're required to come into the physical workspace. And so, providing some form of reimbursement or compensation certainly would not be an inappropriate thing to do. And it really would be equitable if you're allowing some people to remain at home, and therefore don't incur the cost of commuting, that you're kind of leveling the playing field by saying, "By virtue of the fact that we need you to come in, we're going to recognize that you're incurring costs that you didn't occur while you were at home. And we want to compensate you, at some level, even if it's just a reimbursement," which is what we're recommending, obviously, as a way of embracing equity. So yeah, that's certainly the case.

Some organizations have begun to compensate their employees for at home use of Wi-Fi or give them an office supplies allowance, for example, that would allow them to not have to come out of pocket for materials and supplies that they need to do their work. So, that's certainly something that can be done, and we encourage that, but it really needs to be based on the culture of your organization and the needs of your staff. And that's where those staff focus groups can really be beneficial.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: That's all for questions right now, Lisa.

Lisa Brown Alexander: All right. Good stuff. Let's keep going.

So, the big elephant in the room: This issue of vaccinations and workplace safety, and I want to spend some time talking about that. As many of you are contemplating returning to the physical workspace, this is a very hot topic and somewhat controversial, but I think it's important for you to understand what your fellow nonprofit professionals are hearing and what they reported as part of the survey.

One of the primary reasons why organizations are deciding to return to the workplace is because of the increased vaccination rate and the decreasing of the death rate, which was at a fever pitch just a month ago. Because of vaccinations, we're able to remove our masks and move around in a way that we haven't been able to do before. And so, it's really important to understand that having vaccinations in the workplace or requiring that your staff vaccinate or even requesting it is an important part of the return-to-work discussion.

There is also a myriad of other reasons why organizations have decided to return to the workplace. We don't have enough time to kind of go through all those details today, but certainly we encourage you to download the results of the survey, so you can see some of the other reasons why organizations are returning to work, the physical workspace.

In terms of the greatest concerns that employers are having about return to work, the biggest concern—85% of employers that responded to our survey said—mitigating health risks for staff is the major concern followed by determining whether or not vaccinations should be required. There's some controversy around that, we know that the EEOC has changed or established a position that allows folks or employers to require vaccinations under some controlled circumstances.

And then, the third primary concern was creating opportunities for staff to provide input into their return-to-workplace plan. I really, really encouraged the use of focus groups and staff working groups to help you think through your return-to-work strategies, if you haven't done that. It's a great way to foster engagement and will give you some real meaningful insights into the lives and personal circumstances of your staff. So, these are just some of the concerns that we heard from organizations about returning to work.

I thought this particular quote was helpful because, again, when we think about the return to work, we're often thinking about the physical elements of that. What we don't contemplate is that the hesitancy to return to work in many instances is driven by a lack of trust: A lack of trust around the employer and whether or not they want to have all the measures in place to keep employees safe; a lack of trust that fellow colleagues have either been vaccinated or will keep their distance to allow everyone to be safe; and then, just concern and trust around others in the workplace and how they will interact with each other. Those are some concerns that we don't often think about. We're thinking about the physical stuff. But this kind of intangible hesitance that's driven by a lack of trust is something that we really need to unpack in our organization.

What we heard from respondents about the primary concerns of employees who've been returning to the physical workplace is the same as employers. It's health related, it's the risk of infection for themselves. Folks are worried about coming back to work, the physical workplace, either because they themselves have not been vaccinated, or they're fearful of being vaccinated and getting sick, or becoming ill and passing that on to a family member, which is the primary reason why folks are hesitant.

And so, as you build your return-to-work strategy, it's really important that you factor in safety, physical safety, in your communication, your strategy and your planning. Put that at the center because that is the primary thing that employees are concerned about.

Following the risk of infection concern is the use of public transportation. Now, we know that there are some kind of disparate impact elements in the use of public transportation as it relates to equity. Many employees who come from low-wealth communities, for example, rely on public transportation to get to work. And if those employees are consistently exposed to others on public transportation and they either have not, again, been vaccinated or are vaccinated and anxious about getting on public transportation, that's going to be a real pause point for those employees to come to work, if that's the only way they can get there.

We know that the lack of childcare and concerns about others not following protocols are also key concerns that folks have with returning to the workplace. These are all very legitimate concerns, and ones that you'll want to specifically address as you develop your return-to-work communication strategy.

In terms of requiring employees to get COVID vaccinations to return to the workplace, there was some controversy there. But what we heard is 50% of employers are going to require their employees to get vaccination to return to the workplace. That's a large number. Excuse me, I said that backwards. Only 11% are going to require vaccinations to return to the workplace, 50% will not—my apologies for that. And so, many organizations are hopeful. They're encouraging their staff to get vaccinations, but they're not requiring them.

And then some 36% of respondents said they haven't yet made a decision, with a very small percentage, 3%, doing something different. But what you should get from this is as you contemplate your own organization's policies, if you want to benchmark, should we or should we not require people to vaccinate? Know that if you choose to require employees to be vaccinated that you will be in a small percentage of people. The vast majority of organizations are not requiring employees to be vaccinated to return to the physical workplace.

Now, if organizations are not requiring vaccinations, then there's some protocols and safety measures, obviously, you'll want to take to ensure everyone's safety. And there's lots of literature out there, lots of guidelines, tips and tools for creating a physically safe workplace. I don't want to spend too much time on that today, because that's something that we've really been exploring in the public domain extensively for the last several months.

We do have some insights, however, that we'd like to share. Obviously the lowering of the death rate and the higher the vaccination rates are, that's really driving a lot of this, the push to return to the office. And, again, the sheer concern that both employers and employees have is health related. The fear of infection is the leading contributor to whether or not organizations return to the physical environment.

We also know that there's an interesting nuanced difference, and a reasonable nuanced difference, between direct service organizations, who are 27% more concerned than non-direct service organizations about the impact of staff being unwilling to return to work. And we know that direct service organizations require and rely on people being in the physical workplace. Now, that's not directly related to vaccinations, but it's connected. And so, we know that if you're working in a direct care or direct service environment, if your physical health is directly impacted, because you, in many instances, are rendering services to someone in a physical space, then that may give you pause to return to the workplace, if you haven't been vaccinated or you're concerned about others being vaccinated.

We also know that the mandating of vaccines in the workplace is something that the EEOC has taken a position on. There's some good literature out there, about that. You can, in fact, mandate vaccines, but there are some exceptions to that. We'll talk about that in a moment. We know that staff want assurances that when they do return, they're going to be safe. So, everything from having access to sanitizer and masks and PPE and other things is going to be critical.

Then, finally, you'll want to contemplate and look at the challenges associated with boundary management, the physical boundaries. What concerns and anxieties do staff have around physical boundaries? How, if they're going to continue to work virtually, will they balance time boundaries? Many of us have seen the lines blurred between personal and professional time. Our work, in many instances, bleeding over into the evening and we're finding ourselves having burnout, right? And so, those are just some of the challenges that we see organizations grappling with, and we saw a lot of that reflected in the open narrative that came through with the survey.

I want to just talk about the mandate, this vaccine mandate thing, because I know for many of you that's a core issue, that mandating vaccines is core to people feeling safe. But it's important to know that there are exceptions to vaccine mandates. One is physical condition or disability. If you have a disability or a medical condition, that is the grounds under which you can be exempted from an employer-driven vaccine mandate, the other is sincerely held religious belief or practice. It's important for you to understand that while you may establish a vaccine mandate for your organization, there are exceptions. And your staff can opt out, on the basis of these two needs.

And so, we encourage you to consult with your attorney to make sure that you're integrating all the various regulations that impact these exemptions, including EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) guidelines, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, understanding how you can keep information and be HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliant. These are all things that really matter, as you contemplate a return-to-work strategy.

It's important to also look at your physical space and understand whether or not it will allow for social distancing because if it doesn't, that is going to create major concerns for employees and liabilities for employers. If folks are kind of on top of each other, face-to-face, and there's no way that you can modify your workspace to allow for a social distancing, that's going to give folks pause. You're going to need to respond and provide some information and some guidelines to your staff for how you're modifying the physical workplace to allow them to support their safety.

We've talked already about looking at your return-to-work practices through an equity lens; that's going to be critically important, making sure that whatever practices you put in place don't create any disparate impact or disparate treatment concerns for your organization. So, take a look at that. Consult with your DEI person, if you have one on staff. If you don't have one on staff, we certainly encourage you to reach out to a qualified and experienced consultant who can help you put a DEI lens or an equity lens on top of your return-to-work practices and strategy.

And then finally, there is some exposure that organizations have if they're contemplating return to work with supervisors. Supervisors either asking inappropriate questions or just not knowing how to handle the exemption and accommodation requests. There is some exposure there, potentially, from employers. So, it's important to provide separate information to your supervisors about what they can and can't ask about.

Here's a quick snapshot of how to handle questions and mandates and offering time off and all those kinds of things. We looked across the landscape of literature that's out right now around risk that your organization may have as you contemplate return to work and mandate vaccines. And so, generally mandating vaccines is considered, right now, a medium-level risk. It's not something you can't do, but if you're going to do it, there are some caveats, as we've already mentioned.

One of the things that we're seeing and encouraging amongst our clients and other organizations is offering PTO to employees, paid time off, to go get vaccinated, and to not say you've got to use your own leave or you have to take leave without pay in order to give the vaccine. Vaccines are, yes, available everywhere, in many places, anyway. And so, the hour, the half an hour, that it might take for someone to get vaccinated, if you really want to encourage that, we're suggesting that you offer some paid time off for that to happen, much like you do for voting, for example.

It's also OK for, medium risk, to incent your staff to get vaccinated with some sort of reward. So, some organizations will say, "You know what, for everyone who gets vaccinated, we'll give you a \$25 Starbucks card." That's kind of a safe thing to do. What you don't want to do is create tiers of compensation levels, and compensation is more than just salary, right? You don't want to create tiers within your organization that pit vaccinated staff against unvaccinated staff or where you're treating unvaccinated staff differently from a total rewards perspective. Offering a gift card or some other small incentive for vaccination is a reasonable thing to do.

Now, it's perfectly OK to ask, according to the literature and the law community, the legal community, it's reasonable to ask your staff if they've been vaccinated, especially if you're bringing folks back together. What's not reasonable, and what is high risk, is asking your staff why they either have or have not been vaccinated. So, getting to the fact of the matter: "Have you been vaccinated?" is a reasonable question to ask, it is low risk. What you don't want to do is begin to delve into the why, because that starts to get into privacy, HIPAA and all kinds of other complications that you really want to avoid.

With that said, it's also OK, and a low-risk exercise, to ask your staff for proof of vaccination. But it's important to, if you're going to collect that information, do it in a way that is consistent with HIPAA guidelines: Only collecting the information you absolutely need, ensuring that the information is held in a way that is maintaining employee privacy, is limited access only to those who need to have the information and ensuring that that information is not disclosed inappropriately.

All right, there are just a couple of things and then, we're going to move to Q&A. As we wrap up today's session today, I do hope it's been helpful and to lend some additional perspective that perhaps you didn't have before.

It's important to prioritize and anchor your return-to-work actions in employee well-being. Keep well-being at the center of everything that you do as you contemplate your return-to-work strategy. And what that means is every decision that you make, ask the question: Does it support the physical and mental well-being of our employees? Because without addressing that question, you run the risk of implementing practices that will work against your organization. It's also important to acknowledge return-to-work anxiety. There is a lot of it. Just this morning, on the Today Show, there was a feature about return-to-work anxiety. It's real. Many people, particularly if they're health challenged or live with people who are health challenged, have a great deal of anxiety about returning to the workplace. We have to acknowledge that as compassionate, empathetic employers.

We want to also be sure that we have consistent health screening practices and contact tracing measures. If you have an incident or an outbreak of COVID in your physical workplace, what is the process for ensuring that people who have exposure to that individual are notified? Some of you may be familiar with the case that happened with Florida State Government. There was a department, a technology department, that had returned to the workplace. And one person was infected, came into the workplace and infected at least 8 to 10 other people. Only one person among the group had been vaccinated and that individual was the one who did not become ill. Subsequently, two employees passed away. And so, this is real. If you're going to bring people back into the workplace, you've got to not only have a clear screening strategy and a clear set of procedures, but you'll also need a clear process for notifying people if, and when, there is an incident of COVID in the workplace.

We also want to encourage you to craft communications for returning employees to really focus on their safety and help them understand every safety measure that you've put in place and how you plan to enforce those safety measures. That's really important and really helps to address this return-to-work anxiety that people are feeling.

We also want to encourage you to look across your landscape of employment policies to make sure that you've contemplated those policies through the framework of workplace flexibility, remote work, leave and travel. For example, you may have a travel policy that says staff can only travel on behalf of the organization if a meeting is more than 100 miles away. Otherwise, you're encouraging virtual meetings as a way of keeping people safe, minimizing whether or not people get on planes, trains, buses or automobiles. So, look at all of your workplace policies through the lens of COVID and the current environment in which we are living.

Finally, you'll also want to designate, if you haven't done so already, who within your organization is going to be a resource for return-to-work questions or workplace safety questions and continuously make that person accessible, so that staff have no barriers to getting the information that they need.

Then, finally, I said that once before, but this is absolutely finally, consider implementing a voluntary wellness incentive plan that is not just limited to vaccines, but also includes things like gym memberships or yoga, emphasize that you have an employee assistance plan (EAP), if you've got one in place. But create some incentives for employees to focus on self-care and well-being as a strategy for us all managing against this crisis.

It is important, however, that whatever incentives you put in place, that they're not coercive in nature or that they constitute a major component of your total compensation. For the very reasons that we've talked about that, making sure that you're not creating kind of classes with people within your organization and making compensation or employment decisions based on whether or not people are vaccinated or not.

I know we've covered a lot today. I hope this has been helpful. I know that many of you are grappling with what you're going to do as an organization, and I really want to reserve the rest of the time today to answer questions that we may not have tackled. There is a lot of literature out there, I recognize that. We wanted to just encourage you to think about your return-to-work strategy a little bit differently than perhaps you might be reading about, and we do hope that you've gained some good insights. Again, a copy of the survey is available for download from our website. And Atokatha, I'm going to turn it back to you, so we can answer some more specific questions that are participants might have today.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. Thank you so much, Lisa, for sharing so much information so far. We will move into questions and answers session. If you have questions that you've not already asked, please go ahead and plug those into the questions pane, and we will get to as many questions as we can during the next 20 minutes.

Lisa, we have several facilities-related questions, which I'm going to get to. But, there's one question on sick leave, and whether or not there is an opportunity to redesign it and the philosophy, especially as organizations are leaning more on sending employee's home if they demonstrate any sort of symptoms.

Lisa Brown Alexander: Yeah. Now, there's absolutely room for rethinking our sick leave policies and in many organizations, there's a bank of sick leave that people get at the beginning of the year, beginning of their employment, and it's limited. Does that really work? Is that the right way to go for your organization right now? It really is based on your culture, your values as an organization and how you speak about employee well-being and health. If you're a health organization, for example, it would behoove you to be as flexible as you possibly can in the administration of your sick leave policies. Right? And to make space for, and encourage, that employees stay home to care for themselves, minimize exposure to their colleagues and ensure their own well-being.

So, I would say it's more situational. And it's important to look at your culture, your values and your practices to ensure that there's full alignment as it relates to sick leave. But this is not the time to clamp down on folks who say, "You know what, I'm not feeling well." This is not the time for us to become more rigid. Flexibility remains the thread that we pull through all of our return-to-work strategies, and we encourage that of others.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: OK, what if the board or funders begin to question the facilities expenses, especially if there are reductions, or drastic reductions, in the use of space? Are there recommendations for demonstrating return on investment to people who tend to swing very conservatively regarding facilities and expenses over agility and flexibility?

Lisa Brown Alexander: Well, the physical space expense is a real one. Next to labor costs, it oftentimes makes up a significant, or large, portion of an organization's operating budget, and so it's a realistic and reasonable thing to ask. And so, this is where a board and leadership can collaborate, based on your organizational financial goals and restrictions. It may be that it's OK to give up your physical footprint, or to reduce it significantly, based on whether or not you decide you want to be a remote-only organization, a hybrid organization or an in-office organization. Getting reconciliation between those three, though, is where, often, the rub is. Organizations are realizing savings by giving up their physical space or reducing their physical space. I happen to be a fan or a supporter of the hybrid environment, so having some measure of physical space where people can come together to collaborate, but not requiring that you have to have a desk and a seat for every single employee in your organization.

And so, understanding the board's priorities is important as a leader, but it's also important for the board to understand the staff's priorities and the leadership's priorities and what they need and finding that point of compromise in the middle. That's a tough conversation to have. You can also, if you're inclined to make the argument to your board to reduce the physical footprint, talk about what you will do with the savings. What kinds of investments and what kind of return on investments can the board expect if you divest yourself of your physical space? Those are things that you can really do effectively.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: In New York City, office buildings are very close to eliminating the need for social distancing. When that occurs, is there still a liability for an employer if social distancing is not what it was months ago?

Lisa Brown Alexander: Well, there could potentially be, if you don't have other measures in place to ensure the safety of your staff.

So, if organizations in New York are coming together—or coming back into the workplace and no longer practicing social distancing—as an employer, if I were in your position, what I would do is make sure that you've taken steps to ensure the safety of your staff by having staff declare whether or not they've been vaccinated, asking staff to wear masks, if physical distancing is not possible, or allowing people to choose when they come in and how they interact with people in the physical workplace in order for them to feel safe. At the end of the day, as I mentioned before, employee well-being and safety is critical. And so, keep that in mind. Despite the fact that the rest of the world is no longer social distancing, if you are concerned and know that your staff are concerned about coming together in a physical office and not being able to do that, you need to respond to that in your practices and policies. And do it in a way that works for your organization. There's nothing to preclude you from being more cautious as an organization in the interest of the safety of your staff and communicating to your staff that that's why you're doing that.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: OK. Another person is following up to a point that you made regarding not asking why an employee has decided not to vaccinate, et cetera, and this one is, can you ask staff if they're planning to get vaccinated? Why or why not as long as it's anonymous?

Lisa Brown Alexander: You certainly can do it on an anonymous basis. We don't encourage it, however. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. The why question is really a very personal one. And for some folks, they may have a religious objection, others may have a health-related condition that precludes them from not getting vaccinated. And as a result of that, asking them why forces them to disclose that information, which can be incredibly uncomfortable and, in some instances, a violation of privacy. So, you really want to be careful about the why. Asking if you have or have not is a statement of fact, it doesn't involve any judgements, and that's what we we're recommending. Many other organizations that do work similar to ours, including law firms, are making that recommendation right now—that you not ask about the why, but you certainly can ask about, have you or have you not.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. One person is thanking you for bringing up the concept of boundaries, and are saying that they are starting to get messages from their staff that they are concerned about disruptions they weren't experiencing while employees were primarily working from home. What recommendations do you have to help employees understand the need to respect the boundaries of their colleagues while fostering that engagement that you were also talking about?

Lisa Brown Alexander: Hmm. Yeah, I think we're all working through that right now, right? How do we do that?

I'm not sure that I have an answer, but what I would suggest is exploring that in the context of your organization with the people who are working at your organization. A lot of times, we want to look to external benchmarks and make our policy decisions based on what we've read somewhere. But what works for your organization really may be more nuanced than that. And you get insights, meaningful insights, from folks by having those conversations, engaging leadership and staff, having focus groups, doing surveys and really understanding where the anxiety and pain points are in your organization. Then, create a strategy that will work based on your values, your culture, your physical setup because we really do need to be customizing our approach right now. We're all in a precarious position in that employees have very many choices. And a lot of people are exercising those choices and saying, "You know what, I don't have to do this anymore," and they're feeling empowered to make different decisions about their lives. And so, it's important for us to not create generic approaches to our return-to-work strategy, but create approaches that will fit and work for our organizations based on the nuances that exist within them.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great, Lisa. There's also a request, just for you to elaborate more on your points regarding equity and making sure that your return-to-workplace strategies and plans are equitable, particularly around how some minority populations have been responding to return to work versus non-minority populations inside of organizations.

Lisa Brown Alexander: So, I would say that this issue of equity is not just an issue related to people of color versus people who don't identify as people of color, but also, based on those who have children or who live by themselves versus those who don't. What we do want to do is create an environment where our policies support our equity goals. So, for example, if you are requiring a certain level or a certain segment of your workforce to come in, and you don't require it of others, you need to ask yourself why. And if you do require them to come in, how are you recognizing the difference between those segments of your workforce? And how are you honoring those differences in a way that doesn't create classes within the organization?

For example, the question was related to minority staff. Not all staff of color live in low-wealth communities. And so, there are also staff who identify as White who live in low wealth communities. What practices are you going to implement to ensure that the people who have to take the bus, because they have no other form of transportation, are not disadvantaged by having to come in or not losing ground financially by having to come into your organization? This is just one example, but it's really making sure that for whatever practices you put in place, that it doesn't result in folks being disadvantaged or displaced in a way that negatively impacts their ability to contribute equally and equitably in the organization.

I hope that's a good answer. I feel like I didn't quite get to the person's answer, but it's really looking across the landscape of equity. It's not just race-driven, but it's also, again, marital status or spouse status, whether or not you're single and live by yourself or you live with other people, all of those things need to be taken into consideration as you build your strategy to return.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thank you, Lisa. This question is a follow-up to the facilities question and it's around if you've been hearing or seeing anything regarding state-of-the-art accommodating hybrid work models inside of the office. So, for organizations who are returning their employees to the workplace, but they have setups in their office that are not conducive for those types of workforces. What information could you share?

Lisa Brown Alexander: I'll go back to what I shared earlier where some of the most progressive organizations are rethinking their physical space, and they're doing so in a way to enable people to work and maximize their productivity in diverse ways.

Some people work very effectively alone, others work much more effectively in a collaborative environment. And so, in the most progressive organizations, those that are kind of leading the effort in this whole return-to-work movement, they're rethinking their physical workspaces to accommodate that diversity of work styles. They're including, as I said, pods, work booths, large collaboration spaces or open spaces, so that no matter how you choose to work, if you have to come into the physical environment, there's a space where you can do so in a way that's productive.

If you happen to fall in that category as an organization, I would encourage you to look at your physical workspace and ask the question, does the way we're physically set up support the diversity of work styles that are now required to be an organization of the future? And if the answer is no, then obviously, you need to contemplate what that new physical space looks like, the costs associated with that and whether or not that's attainable. Or, adjust your return-to-work strategy to embrace more of a hybrid model to allow for people to both work from home and work in the office in a way to supports their well-being and safety.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: OK, and, Lisa, this is our last question. It's somewhat summarizes several questions around culture. This one focuses on what organizations should really keep front of mind regarding their culture and what things they should be looking out for to determine if their culture is experiencing some sort of disruption.

Lisa Brown Alexander: Look for evidence of stress, of burnout, of frustration by staff of communication, the quality of communication deteriorating, work product or service delivery suffering to members of the community or people that you serve. Those are all indications that something is happening in your culture, and it's critically important as a leader of your organization, if you are the leader of your organization, to see culture as important as programs, as important as finance, as important of fundraising.

Without having a healthy culture, your organization's mission cannot be successfully or fully achieved. And so, prioritize culture. Pay attention to what people are saying. Ask people how they feel. Don't assume that you know anything. Ask, double check, verify, delve deeper, then adjust as you learn, so that you can be a responsive, agile organization. Culture is everything. As the famous saying goes, culture eats strategy for breakfast. We cannot move into this return-to-work world without recognizing the importance of having a healthy workplace culture. Communicate, communicate and communicate some more. Encourage your staff to share their perspectives in as many different venues as possible.

And last, but certainly not least, respond to what you hear. Respond. It's critical to respond. Culture is everything, especially as we move into this unprecedented era, now struggling with COVID behind us and around us and trying to get back to some degree of normalcy.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thank you so much, Lisa. Thank you. That's all the time we have for Q&A.

Thank you to everyone who attended today's webinar. We hope you found it valuable. We will have the recording for this event, and also the slides from this event, out to you in a few days. And for live attendees, you can expect to receive SHRM and HRCI recertification credits, as well. There are many more webinars that are coming up in 2021, so please visit our website at nonprofithr.com/events to see what's coming up and to register.

And please be sure to complete the feedback survey that will pop up once this webcast has ended. Your comments help us with our planning and the topics we cover in the future as well. If you'd like more information about Nonprofit HR and the services that we offer, please visit us online at nonprofithr.com or email us at info@nonprofithr.com. Again, thank you so much Lisa Brown Alexander for your presentation and sharing this information with us.

And to our guests, have a great rest of your afternoon.