The COVID-19 Effect on Wisconsin's Nonprofit Sector

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Moving Forward

Considerations for Nonprofit Re-Engagement

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Disclaimer

This is intended to be a recommendation for Wisconsin nonprofit organizations as you reengage with your communities after COVID-19 related closures. Should you have specific questions regarding legal or financial issues, please consult your appropriate legal and financial professionals. All guidelines from federal, state, and local health departments supersede this document.

Operations and Workplace Readiness

The first task of any nonprofit in the reengagement process is to establish a task force and task force leader that will be responsible for all decisions moving forward. In a small nonprofit, this will be the job of the Executive Director/CEO, along with members of the Board of Directors. In much larger organizations, a staff-led task force, including an HR manager, finance director, and 4-5 other senior staff members, is suggested to help guide decision-making.

Before returning to the office, **communicate new protocols and procedures before the staff returns to the workspace** to not only establish those best practices but also show to your team the seriousness and care in protecting their health and well-being. Additionally, keep the office as sanitized as possible. Consider assigning staff to a task force dedicated to maintaining clean offices, along with keeping staff up to date on protocols.

Preparing the Workspace for Return

Thoroughly clean and sanitize the workspace, particularly common areas, bathrooms, and other congregating facilities (lunchrooms or break areas, kitchens, conference rooms).

Ensure you have cleaning supplies on hand for more active daily cleaning for the foreseeable future. These include sanitizing wipes, bleach, and disinfectant sprays.

Before staff arrival, assess the space for social distancing (desks six feet apart, use cubicles and offices). Also, look for areas where staff, volunteers, or clientele could congregate (waiting rooms, conference rooms), and assess those spaces for social distancing. While a space may hold 30, to ensure social distancing is possible, consider changing the capacity to ten persons or under.

Once arrived, **enforce a clean desk policy**.

Make cleaning supplies and sanitizers available in all parts of the office.

You may find that your organization might consider only bringing a portion of staff back to the office while others will continue working remotely because of spacing issues.

Follow all guidelines for sanitation and social distancing from your local health department.

Ongoing Sanitation and Social Distancing Guidelines

Clean public rooms daily (waiting rooms, conference rooms, bathrooms). You may want to increase professional cleaning and sanitation for these reasons. Remove trash daily.

Staff should wash hands regularly and should avoid excessive touching of communal surfaces if possible.

Have disinfecting wipes available in all public areas as well as hand sanitizer.

Ask staff to remember also to sanitize their desks, equipment, and office areas regularly (at least daily) to prevent the spread of germs. Also, sanitize equipment in shared rooms (copiers, projectors, monitors) daily if multiple people are using it.

Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.

If surfaces are dirty, clean using a detergent or soap and water before disinfection.

For disinfection, the most common Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered household disinfectants should be adequate. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time). (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf)

Discourage workers from using co-workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.

Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools, and equipment) can be wiped down by employees before each use. To disinfect, use products that meet the EPA criteria for use against COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface.

Use good judgment on sanitation and let all staff and volunteers know your internal procedures for cleaning to set expectations and alleviate concerns.

Nonprofits are full of huggers and hand-shakers. It will be hard but avoid physical contact.

If you do not require masks at work, please remind people of "respiratory etiquette" that includes covering a cough or sneeze, using, and throwing away tissues.

Place signage in bathrooms to wash hands along with signage to remind people of social distancing and etiquette.

When in doubt, do not put groups of people into hygienically compromising situations.

Don't assume everyone understands hygienic concepts. You will find yourself in situations with some clientele who will need instruction, reminding, and assistance with some basic tasks such as handwashing and sanitizing.

Consider the following social distancing suggestions to avoid unnecessary exposure:

- Implementing flexible worksites (e.g., telework)
- Implementing flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts)
- Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite
- Increasing physical space between employees and customers
- Implementing flexible meeting and travel options (e.g., postpone non-essential gatherings or events)
- Downsizing operations
- Delivering services remotely (e.g., phone, video, or web)
- Delivering products through virtual or digital platforms
- Relying less on paper passed around the office

Food Handling

At first, you might require limited or no communal food in the office or organization, which could mean a requirement that all employees and volunteers bring their meals or eat off-site. Avoid potluck-style meals or open, self-serve buffets, up to and including free coffee service, for the time being. Your organization may also restrict communal food in refrigerators or communal cupboards.

You might consider asking all employees to eat alone to preserve social distancing for the near future.

For any food prepared and served for clientele, all nonprofits should follow local health department guidelines. Additionally, the FDA has produced a set of guidelines for common food preparation and service. (https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19)

If you do serve any food, remember that appetizers, hors d'oeuvres, food, and all beverages, including water, tea, wine, beer, or adult beverages, **should not be self-served**. All food and drink should be served from service staff wearing appropriate PPE to reduce contamination. Organizations should not provide any buffets, tables with appetizers, or any self-serve wine or beverages to staff and attendees.

Protocols for Public Opening and Closure

While your office may be ready to bring back employees and volunteers, your organization may not be accepting public appointments. Ensure you communicate on doors, your website, and social media when open hours may resume.

Inform employees about who is allowed in the building and who should not enter, including family members or friends of employees, donors, volunteers.

Let employees and volunteers know when the organization can receive visitors or the public.

Ensure signs of hygiene and disease prevention protocols are visible and accessible if you do receive the public. If you regularly work with clientele where English is not the first language, translate those into the appropriate language.

For contact-tracing purposes, have ALL visitors sign in when they enter. That information may be necessary for local health departments.

If you have mail services forwarded or collected, be sure to contact the USPS to ensure mail is delivered when ready.

Human Resources Considerations

Human Resources and Staffing

Once your office return is assessed and determined, organizational leadership should meet to discuss which staff should return to the office and when.

These decisions should be very flexible, as you have to consider staffing needs and potential accommodations for some staff in specific categories.

You might decide to give immediate accommodations to staff with known compromises to their health or those in high-risk health categories, age, or disability.

Be open to some staff requests for continued work remotely privileges, particularly those in higher-risk health categories.

Familiarize yourself with the provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and establish a procedure for accommodating requests for leave or accommodations requested by employees. (https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/Pandemic/FFCRA-Employer_Paid_Leave_Requirements.pdf)

Familiarize yourself and your staff of all "paid-time-off" policies, including vacation, sick leave, work remotely, and provisions from the FFCRA.(https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/Pandemic/FFCRA-Employee_Paid_Leave_Rights.pdf)

Ensure you have communicated any new procedures and protocols to all returning staff members.

Leadership and Human Resources should establish protocols for any employees requesting further work from home, accommodations, or exceptions.

You may continue (for the time being) work remotely plans for those who can effectively do their jobs away from the office to lower physical capacity and increase social distancing at the office or facility.

Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees understand these policies.

Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member or take care of children due to school and childcare closures. Additional flexibilities might include giving advances on future sick leave and allowing employees to donate sick leave to each other.

Employers that do not currently offer sick leave to some or all of their employees may want to draft non-punitive "emergency sick leave" policies.

Your staff and volunteers are the lifeblood of your nonprofit mission. Some issues will arise as you bring staff back into offices and facilities. We recommend that you follow SHRM best practices and guidelines, as well as seek counsel with HR attorneys and professionals as you go through this process.

Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be busy and not able to provide such documentation promptly.

Your organization may wish to ask the staff to take their temperatures. Any staff member who expresses any symptoms of COVID-19 or severe respiratory issues should leave the location immediately and go home.

Provide access to testing or resources where employees can find an appropriate screening.

Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are compatible with existing state and federal workplace laws. For more information on employer responsibilities, visit the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity websites.

Connect employees to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources (if available) and community resources as needed. Employees may need additional social, behavioral, and other services, for example, to cope with their work with the field or with the death of a loved one.

Plan for staff absences. Staff needs to stay home when they are sick or need to stay home to care for an infected household member or care for their children in the event of school dismissals.

Identify critical job functions and positions and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to preparing for holiday staffing). Provide instructions about how and when to return to work safely.

Anxiety, Depression and Other Mental Health Issues

For most, the COVID-19 quarantine experience has been very concerning, and some individuals will report significant anxiety, fear, and reticence about re-entering the workplace. Organizations should not be dismissive or judgmental about this anxiety.

It is essential that staff members have an avenue to express concerns, whether with co-workers, leadership, an EAP representative, or other outlets.

Leadership, management, and co-workers should be ready to work with staff members and volunteers in an **empathetic and trauma-informed behavior**.

Remember, trauma and anxiety can manifest in many ways. Nonprofits should be ready to refer employees to professional mental health services should the need arise.

Nonprofits need to understand that this isn't "business as usual" and that we will need to be perceptive and attune to our staff's, volunteers' and clienteles' mental health.

Re-Engagement in Phases

A larger nonprofit may bring employees back to the office or facility in phases and waves.

Consider the timing and triggers for those phases back to the office.

Also, consider evaluating each phase as it happens before starting the next through surveying or data exploration as well as using data and guidance from outside sources (health data, economic data).

Regression

At any point, there could be a resurgence of the virus, forcing organizations back into quarantine or work situations remotely. Should this occur, follow similar steps to a previous change to your operations. Ensure active and quick communication with your staff, volunteers, clientele, and constituents. Have a plan in case you need to move back a step or two in your re-engagement plan.

Board Governance

Remembering that boards govern, not manage, these are some guiding thoughts of working with your board as your nonprofit re-engages and leans on their possible resources as nonprofits move forward.

In a crisis, the balance of governing and managing can shift. These are considerations to have while your organization finds its new footing post-COVID-19 as your board focuses on what needs to happen next.

Board Communication

As you begin to re-engage**, inform the board of your plans and phases of re-engagement**. Feel free to share this document with your board so that they understand the direction of reopening.

Work with the board chair and chair-elect in partnership with the executive director to ask for any possible assistance or advice, particularly with those board members engaged in this process with their own respective companies and employers.

Through the process, have **regular updates (weekly, typically)** to the board on how things are going.

Remember, your nonprofit has a full-time job with your mission, and COVID-19-related activities are taking a lot of your time. Keep the board up to date on your mission-related events as well.

Policies and Procedures

Through the crisis, you may have had to alter, discontinue, or enact policies and procedures as part of a continuation of a business plan. Regularly, inform and work with board leadership on any other alterations you may need to make.

Review bylaws and current policies in place before making big decisions in a time of crisis. This way, you can potentially give more leadership to an executive committee for emergency decisions.

Management decisions should continue to be made by the Executive Director, while the board makes governance decisions. Executive Directors should keep the board informed of those major management decisions happening at the staff level.

Ensure that you have a crisis communications plan in place that establishes the spokesperson of the nonprofit.

Other Leadership Responsibilities

Ensure board and leadership have a firm understanding of any risk, liability, and who assumes it. The board should also approve an Emergency and Disaster Plan to mitigate future crises.

Depending on circumstances, a board may have already or may establish a crisis task force depending on the nature of the business.

Boards and committees SHOULD continue to meet on a regularly established schedule, and they may consider elongating meetings or having an emergency or added sessions as the nonprofit deals with the crisis.

Communications and Public Relations

To the Public

Depending on your mission, you will want to communicate to the public your intentions about re-engagement. Let them know your general timeline and what to expect through a press release, an email, or a simple statement on social media and your website.

As part of that communication, **be transparent** and let them know the processes that guide your decision-making.

If you are a very public-facing organization that regularly engages the public, be detailed in your protocols to communicate that your organization is enacting the protocols to keep the public safe.

Establish a “single point of contact” or spokesperson for all media and public relations purposes.

To Staff

Communication to staff, board, and volunteers should be especially transparent and in as great detail as necessary.

Let them know immediately the plans to re-engage and give sufficient notice so that they can make accommodations as they begin to transition from working remotely.

Ongoing Communications

Develop a plan of ongoing communications for the next several months that focuses on both internal work (staff, board, clientele) and external work (donors, supporters, the general public).

Keep individuals informed about changes in programming or program delivery, protocols or procedures, and policy changes.

Ensure your website and social media communication are up to date. Hours of operation may change, or you may need to communicate protocols for visitors.

Communication is critical in all of our relationships, and transparency is essential during a crisis. It is an optimal time to engage your closest allies as you navigate reopening.

Events and Donor Relations

Nonprofits host many special events with many purposes. Below are some guidelines for these events that will depend heavily on health department regulations around gathering people together. Nonprofits, performing arts organizations, congregations, and other organizations that gather groups together should continue to follow guidelines from local and state health departments to preserve the health and safety of all involved.

Special Events

Follow local regulations about the number of people allowed to be together.

Ensure that social distancing tactics are followed.

Encourage those attending to wear masks and observe their social distancing techniques.

For food handling, use licensed caterers and allow no "self- service" type handling.

Inform all guests of any unique protocols in place at events before they attend (mask-wearing, social distancing, food, other etiquettes you will observe).

Have contingencies in place in the event of postponement, cancellation, change of plans.

If you have postponed an event to late summer or fall of 2020, have a cancellation contingency in place.

Keep donors informed of all contingencies.

Consider online-only events.

For small events, work with a restaurant or licensed caterer to provide food. We do not recommend self-catered or "potluck" style group meals, mainly if you are working with individuals in high-risk groups.

Granting or Sponsorship Relationships

Communicate with your program officer or community relations director (the person responsible for overseeing your grant or sponsorship) as soon as possible. They want to hear from you.

Let them know your plans on re-engagement and opening, any changes to program delivery, any changes on deliverables, or expectations.

Provide the information on your financial position and be completely transparent. Emergency grant programs, along with various emergency funds, have been established around the state.

Work with them on unrestricting some funds if you're in need.

Let them know if you successfully applied for and received PPP funding from the Small Business Administration.

If you are postponing an event, contact donors first and then announce the postponement. Discuss any necessary contingencies about their donation.

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