



# Human Resources Trends to Look Out for in 2021

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# Challenging. Eye-opening. Life-altering. Unprecedented.

To capture in words the impact of 2020 on our personal and professional lives is near impossible. It was a year for the history books—one that changed the landscape of business (and the role HR plays in it) for the foreseeable future, and beyond.

Throughout 2020, it often fell on Human Resources personnel or teams to strengthen and build connections between employers (who were struggling to keep their businesses afloat) and employees—who were juggling health and financial concerns, homeschooling and, for many, new remote-work environments. Through the years, the role of HR has evolved, in breadth and depth, to include a broad range of services that support employers and employees; to usher in cultural change; and to foster innovative talent in the workplace. In 2021 and beyond, that role has expanded tenfold.

## 2021 ushered in a new era in human resources.

As the world pivots to a dynamic, hybrid environment, where companies reinvent how they deliver services, nurture diversity and build sustainability into the fabric of their organizations, **HR will be at the center of it all**—helping employers and employees navigate, adapt, and succeed—every step of the way.

Following are some of the most important  
HR trends to look out for in 2021.



[gnapartners.com](https://gnapartners.com)





# COVID-19 Pandemic Remains an Influencing Factor

The COVID-19 pandemic has not faded into the shadows in 2021. Businesses are moving from crisis response mode to weaving resilience and sustainability into their daily operations. HR continues to play a key role in delivering services to a workforce that is dealing with the impact of a global pandemic and transitioning to a hybrid work environment—where many will shift to a combination of in-office/remote flexible schedules for the long term.

This transition requires companies to **evolve** their training protocols, recruiting efforts, digital transformations, physical and mental wellness programs, and safety and compliance efforts.

**Trend 1**

# Shifting to a Hybrid Workplace

The pandemic did not introduce the concept of remote work, but it did prove it was a viable and reliable option for employers and employees alike. Prior to March 2020, some companies were experimenting with flexible schedules, condensed work weeks and virtual meetings, but it was not yet the norm.

[According to Global Analytics/Iometrics' Global Work-From-Home Experience Survey](#) (May 2020) approximately 31% of the workforce worked from home – or a remote location – more than one day a week pre-pandemic.



**That number shot up to 88% after COVID-19 lockdown measures were introduced, with most of the remaining 12% required to report to the workplace because they were considered essential workers.**

As the days and months wore on, managers on all levels began to recognize that employees were proactively and positively adapting to their virtual work environment. Approximately 70% of managers who participated in the Global Analytics/Iometrics' survey said employee productivity and performance during the pandemic was the same or better than before lockdown. As a result, it's estimated that U.S. companies saved \$30 billion, each day, in potentially lost productivity during the pandemic. Employees also realized cost savings and improved work-life balance due to working from home on a prolonged basis.

## HR Perspective

The introduction of a COVID-19 vaccine and safe/healthy workplace practices has resulted in more employees returning to the office in 2021. However, the workplace landscape has changed forever. A 100% virtual global workplace is not (yet) on the horizon, but many companies are committed to a [hybrid model](#) that promises more flexibility for employees whose positions do not require them to work at a particular site.



76%

Approximate percentage of employees that would like to work remotely at least two days a week post-pandemic.

- Global Analytics/Iometrics' survey

Employers are responding by weighing options and costs in an effort to provide more flexibility in workplace locations and schedules. HR's role in accommodating the [demands of a hybrid workplace](#) will be essential and complex, including adapting company policies, procedures, recruiting, and training protocols, as well as adapting health and wellness programs.

Trend 2

# Reinventing Business Agility

Business and industry have been confronted with rapid change since computers and the Internet became common workplace tools. The pandemic revved that pace to warp speed. What does this mean? To succeed, businesses MUST be able to pivot quickly and efficiently in response to emerging economic, technological and societal innovations, as well as emergencies – both man made and natural. The choice to adapt to change at a slow or steady pace has effectively been taken off the table. Human Resources is at the forefront of ensuring a smooth transition for [employees as they return to work](#) and as companies adapt to this new environment.

Forbes contributor  
Tracy Bower writes:



*“HR is in arguably the best position to see overall processes and offer a systemic viewpoint, ensuring coordination, communication and collaboration across units, functions, business groups and silos. HR can facilitate dialogues that help ensure the right amounts of reinvention, reportioning and reprioritizing of business goals to adapt to shifting customer demands and markets in response to the crisis created by COVID-19.”*

# HR Perspective

As businesses reinvent their agility in 2021, HR will play a central role in adapting workplace operations that keep employees “whole,” including:



## Executing daily tasks

(payroll, reporting, scheduling, training, recruiting, benefits administration)



## Implementing health and wellness initiatives

(mental and physical)



## Communicating changing workplace policies and procedures



## Promoting productivity and a cohesive, successful company culture



**Trend 3**

# Developing COVID-Friendly Workforce Policies and Procedures

**Policies and procedures** are the backbone of a business. Without them, there is limited internal structure and a company becomes vulnerable to outside forces. A successful internal structure maintains flexibility, allowing it to bend and twist as the company grows and moves forward. After the pandemic unleashed its forces on employers and employees alike in 2020, provisions were triggered in existing laws designed to protect employees in the event of an emergency. Businesses were required to implement these measures to help employees during the pandemic and were also tasked with developing vital policies in response to the health and safety risks posed by COVID-19. It was a combined tall order for HR personnel and departments.

*"The Littler Employer Pulse Survey Report" (Nov. 18, 2020)  
produced by the Littler Workplace Policy Institute found:*

Representatives from 56% of participating organizations say they are struggling with navigating existing and new provisions of the various laws that govern time off, scheduling and accommodation requests from employees with children whose education and care are affected by COVID-19.



# HR Perspective

As the pandemic (and its repercussions) persist, HR teams are tasked with developing new policies and procedures – or amending existing ones – that outline social distancing protocols; the response procedures for COVID-19 diagnosis, symptoms report or exposure; and possibly face mask, temperature screening and testing mandates.



HR will also need to ensure that company policies are updated to reflect legislation passed during the pandemic such as:

- **[The Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(FFCRA\)](#):** Enacted April 1, 2020, the FFCRA required employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide paid sick time and paid family and medical leave to their employees. It also provided a series of refundable tax credits to those employers. The law expired on December 31, 2020, however, employers may elect to continue allowing employees to take unused FFCRA paid sick and family leave and receive the federal tax credit for doing so through September 30, 2021.
- **[The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#):** This relief package was signed into law on March 27, 2020 and provided further aid to businesses, workers, and those unemployed as a result of the pandemic. This stimulus measure introduced the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), among other forgivable loans and tax-relief measures, in an attempt to alleviate some of the financial stress placed on businesses of all sizes during the pandemic.
- **[The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 \(CAA\)](#):** This stimulus and omnibus spending bill was signed into law on December 27, 2020, and extended some of the deadlines established in the FFCRA and CARES Act. It also introduced a second-draw loan option for the PPP, among other changes, and retroactive allowances specifically meant to help small and mid-sized businesses remain open.
- **[The American Rescue Plan Act](#):** This law, which includes a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus, was signed into law on March 11, 2021, and builds further upon the the three laws listed above—extending some deadlines and providing further guidance on COVID-19 vaccinations. It also includes a COBRA subsidy and extends the weekly \$300 unemployment insurance bonus through September 6, 2021.

**Trend 4**

# Safeguarding Employees and Maintaining Compliance

Protecting employees and maintaining compliance in a pre-pandemic world was a time-consuming and often difficult task. Factor in challenges imposed by COVID-19 and the tasks can seem monumental. Business owners understand that it's vital to safeguard their employees—whether they are essential and cannot work from home, are now returning to work, or continue to work from home.



An HR department, manager, or HR outsourcing agency, like G&A, **can help ensure a company is complying with all federal, state and local regulations, as well as implementing safety protocols that proactively address a variety of threats, ranging from workplace accidents to COVID-19.**

## HR Perspective

Implementing company safety and compliance measures is an area where HR teams shoulder significant responsibility, and pandemic-related protocols will stay put throughout 2021 and beyond.

- G&A Partners Safety Consultant, Jesse Valencia, said OSHA guidelines should be the “bare minimum” of measures taken to provide a safe and comfortable workplace for employees. “OSHA guidelines and CDC recommendations and findings can and will change,” said Valencia. “So, businesses should remain vigilant and monitor their websites regularly to ensure compliance.”



Click to See Webinar

Find tips on how to implement safety and health procedures beyond basic OSHA guidance in G&A's:

[“Understanding OSHA's New Guidance to Prevent COVID-19”](#) recorded webinar.

**Trend 5**

# Recruiting and Training in a Virtual World

Another positive aspect of the world’s evolving hybrid work environment is access to a global talent pool that, in the past, may have been out of reach due to geographical boundaries. In a world where remote work is the norm, location becomes much less of a determinant hiring factor. Why? Candidates don’t have to move to take a job, and companies don’t have to bear expensive relocation costs.



A significant consideration in managing a virtual (or partially virtual) business operation is that recruiting, onboarding and training programs will most likely take place online. Virtual recruiting and training programs are new to most, so HR managers will need to gather best practices along the way. For small to mid-sized businesses, tapping into a PEO’s comprehensive HR support, including recruiting expertise, can help them to successfully bring employees back to the workplace or shift to a long-term hybrid environment, and provide new training programs that help build skills in online communication, engagement, and management of remote and hybrid teams.

## HR Perspective

Managing a deeper talent pool is an exciting proposition, but it represents a shift in the status quo for most HR teams. Eleesha Martin, Recruiting Manager for G&A Partners said employers will have to find a way to [quickly and easily identify top talent](#) when they're ready to resume business as usual. She recommends using fair hiring practices when conducting interviews with viable candidates, eliminating biases, and making sure that the candidate selected is a good fit based on their skillset and cultural fit. Martin says the mindset for recruiting should still be the same now as it always has been—you're just choosing from a larger pool of candidates.



**Trend 6**

# Managing Ongoing Digital Transformation

During the pandemic, companies across the globe transformed from primarily centralized enterprises to remote working teams, and IT departments scrambled to find and implement technology that accommodated new and expanding digital needs. The first several months of the pandemic reaped equal servings of frustration and amusement as millions of employees experimented with online meeting platforms and experienced audio delays, camera failures, and more than a few children or pets who hijacked meetings.

The pandemic **accelerated technology's role** in business operations and that trend does not appear to be losing steam in 2021 and beyond. The Littler Pulse Survey Report found that:



Use Video Conferencing Software



Use Technology-Driven Recruiting and Hiring Tools

## HR Perspective

With businesses going full steam ahead with digital transformations, HR will be instrumental in addressing employees' technological skill gaps and training needs, and ensuring they are connected with the internal resources they need to implement cybersecurity measures in a remote setting.





Trend 7

# Prioritizing Employees' Mental Health and Wellness

Millions of employees are experiencing mental health issues related to, or exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic. **HR representatives play an important role in discreetly delivering support and services that can help address their needs.**



Olivia Curtis, Wellness Specialist for G&A Partners, said many remote workers experience “out of sight, out of mind” or that their work and dedication are being questioned since they are not physically in the office. Employees in this situation often find that the lines between work and home become blurred, and they can experience higher levels of stress. The [key to addressing and lessening the anxiety and loneliness](#) employees may be experiencing at this time is to over communicate and overdeliver, she said.

## HR Perspective

The effects of living in a pandemic world may linger for some time so supporting mental health, physical health, social connectivity, and family care should be top priorities for business owners.

HR can offer employees support through employee assistance programs that offer tools for:

- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Financial counseling
- ▶ Mental health resources

HR can also educate managers on how to [identify signs of stress and burnout](#) and encourage employees to check in on one another frequently during this time.



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives Forge Ahead in 2021

Though a pervasive atmosphere of fear and concern enveloped our world in 2020, there was also a collective pause in the frenetic pace that had become the norm for many Americans. It was partially due to this hiatus – and tragic events that highlighted inequalities – that conversations progressed exponentially around gender, racial and disability gaps. HR leaders who champion [diversity, equity and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) initiatives recognize that societal and cultural expectations dictate that the time has come to move from setting DEI goals to making inclusion the norm in the workplace.

Trend 1

# Employees' Expectations Will Drive Change

The growing social justice movements in 2020, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting disparities in gender, race and disability, encouraged many businesses to issue public statements of support for Americans who suffer discrimination; and to pledge to enact real change within their own footprint.



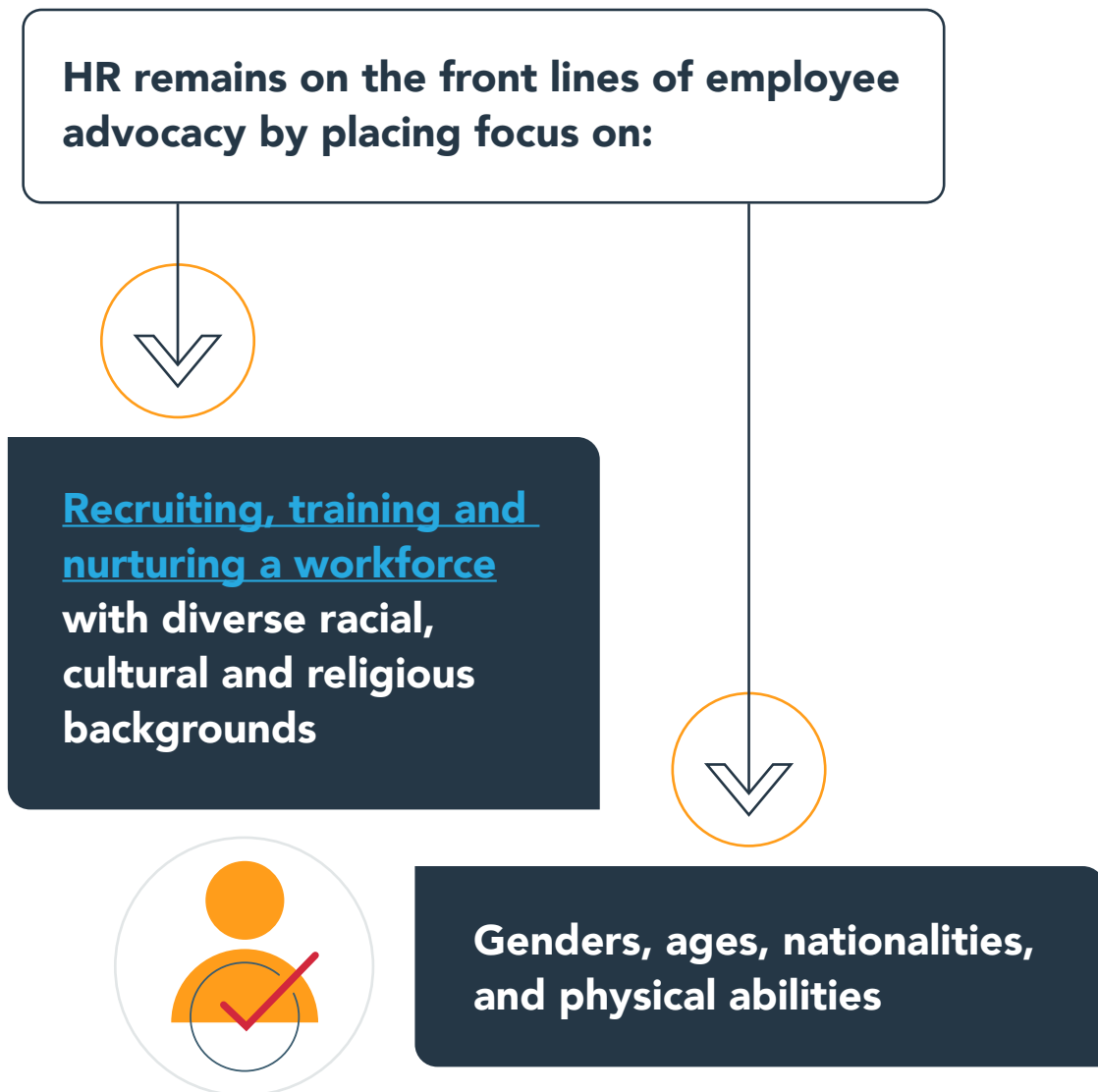
A powerful source pushing for sustainable change in the workplace is employees.



Glassdoor's Diversity & Inclusion Workplace Survey (September 2020) found that significantly more Black (71%) and Hispanic (72%) employees say their employer should be doing more to increase the diversity of its workforce than white (58%) employees. Another important statistic from the survey: About 1 in 3 employees and job seekers (32%) would not apply to a job at a company where there is a lack of diversity among its workforce.

# HR Perspective

HR teams will continue to play an important role in effecting change in company culture by including diverse voices in ongoing discussions and ensuring equal access to opportunities.



## Trend 2

# Progressing from Goal Setting to a DEI Culture

More than ever, businesses are weaving [diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) into the fabric of their workplaces—taking substantive action in implementing DEI efforts and enacting real culture changes. Many have also formed DEI task forces, set hiring targets, instituted training and mentorship programs and instituted efforts to encourage employee feedback that can be used to measure company success – or failure – so that changes can be made in real time.

According to Lucy Garcia, a client advocate and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) expert for G&A Partners, [committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) is an ongoing daily process that will not bear fruit overnight. *“It’s like making a decision to get into shape. If you go to the gym every day, you will not see a change right away. But if you stay consistent and disciplined, you will begin to see the results of your efforts.”*

**To ensure success, Garcia recommends launching a diversity, equity, and inclusion plan in 4 phases:**

- 1** Capture data on employee demographics and compare it with the labor market to identify areas of concern or trends
- 2** Design a strategy that matches business objectives
- 3** Implement a plan of action and select a group of individuals or volunteers to help promote DEI initiatives and review data to ensure long-term success
- 4** Continually evaluate and update the program

## HR Perspective

Diversity officers and/or DEI teams should work closely with HR to carry out actions that promote change throughout the organization. These include:



- ▶ Educating management and employees
- ▶ Reviewing and revising policies and procedures to ferret out potentially discriminatory practices
- ▶ Developing sound hiring practices
- ▶ Providing diversity training for all employees
- ▶ Helping to create an inclusive work culture
- ▶ Addressing employees' concerns immediately and fairly



# Economic Distress Endures in 2021

The economic ramifications of COVID-19 have, in some form or fashion, impacted all employers and employees. Government relief packages and other factors have helped the economy to rebound – somewhat – but many individuals remain jobless or are struggling to make ends meet on limited income. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Economic Outlook report (December 2020) states that "Vaccination campaigns, concerted health policies and government financial support are expected to lift global GDP by 4.2% in 2021 after a fall of 4.2% this year."

**This is encouraging economic news, but it remains to be seen how quickly that translates to employees returning to the workplace in 2021.**



## Trend 1

# Offer Emergency Assistance to all Employees

Until the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine has translated to more widespread economic stability, it's important for employers to offer employees emergency support, as well as remote and flexible work options.

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) required many employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide paid sick time and paid leave for childcare needs, and some state and local laws require employers to provide supplemental paid sick time and paid family and medical leave. However, the Consolidated Appropriations Act made this leave optional for employers in 2021. In March 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act extended the deadline for this leave and the associated employer tax incentive to September 30, 2021.



According to the National Partnership for Women & Families, when sick workers are able to stay home to recover, it lessens the risk of contagion, making workplaces healthier and employees more productive.

**Paid sick days help to reduce potential productivity loss (averaging 20% for an employee working while sick) and the risk of spreading infection.**

## HR Perspective

Employers are expected to comply with new, existing and amended legislation that protects employees' paid sick time and paid family and medical leave. HR has always contributed guidance and expertise in compliance matters and should continue to lead companies' efforts to ensure that all workers are protected with these baseline benefits.



## Trend 2

# Support Employees Who are Furloughed or Laid Off

One of the most difficult aspects of HR's role is to inform an employee that he/she has been furloughed, laid off, or fired. Unfortunately, throughout the pandemic HR managers had to deliver the bad news time and again. HR reps have also been charged with helping to maintain productivity and engagement – and health and wellness – among the remaining workforce.



Companies can explore programs that help ease the pain employees continue to experience due to economic challenges in 2021. For example, an employee work-sharing plan provides employers with an alternative to lay-offs. Instead of letting go a certain number of employees, an employer can reduce the hours and wages of all workers who are then eligible for pro-rated unemployment benefits to supplement their paycheck. Workers should also be notified when hiring resumes and provided first right of refusal for reestablished (or equivalent) positions within the company or organization.

# HR Perspective

HR teams can help ease the pain, anxiety and pressure experienced by employees who are furloughed or laid off in 2021 by showing compassion, communicating important information and sharing helpful resources. Furloughed and laid-off workers are eligible for state and federal benefits, including [federally-funded unemployment insurance programs](#) that may provide benefits or extend workers' eligibility for benefits:

- ▶ Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC)
- ▶ Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)
- ▶ Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

Furloughed or laid-off employees may also be able to maintain free health insurance coverage through COBRA and are eligible for a special enrollment period through the Affordable Care Act's marketplaces. HR professionals can educate employees about their options, including maintaining benefits (such as health insurance and life insurance) for furloughed workers and providing severance for laid-off workers.





# HR Toolkit

After one of the most difficult years on record, business owners are making some pretty significant changes to past practices and processes—changes that will have short and long-term effects on their business.

**Some of the most important considerations employers are facing today include:**

- ▶ Bringing remote employees back to the workplace
- ▶ Continuing to manage remote workers
- ▶ Promoting company-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives
- ▶ Maintaining regulatory compliance in a changing world
- ▶ Adapting policies, procedures and protocols
- ▶ Delivering employees services
- ▶ Building sustainability into the fabric of their organizations

The following guidelines and checklists were created to help you and your team move ahead successfully—leading your company into a new era.

# Pandemic Workplace Recovery Plan

Throughout 2021, more employees will return to work in person, prompting businesses to prepare their workplaces for a smooth transition. Whether your company plans to adopt 100% virtual, 100% in-person or a hybrid work environment, it's important to create a Pandemic Workplace Recovery plan and put it into action.

## Checklist

### Create a Pandemic Workplace Recovery Plan

- Assemble a Pandemic Workplace Recovery (PWR) team with executives, managers, and representatives from key departments, including Human Resources, Information Technology, Safety, Communications, Building Management and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Establish PWR plan goals that align with business objectives. At the top of that list should be a determination of the types of workplace options your company will offer in 2021 and beyond: all-virtual, all in-person, or a hybrid.
- If employees are returning to the workplace, determine who will come back and when (with a detailed schedule) and create a plan to prepare your physical workplace for their return.
- Develop strategies for virtual employees that ensure they have information and resources they need to work remotely.
- Make decisions regarding [furloughed employees](#), including who will return to work, in what capacity (virtual or in-person) and when. Do the same if you plan to rehire employees who were laid off during the pandemic.
- Determine how independent contractors, temporary workers, and contractors fit into the PWR plan.
- Conduct an internal assessment of your policies, protocols and procedures to accommodate pandemic-related revisions and adaptations.
- Create a PWR-related training program to help employees learn about new and revised policies, protocols and procedures, whether they will work in-person, virtually or a combination of both.
- Create a robust communications plan that details how and when your business will share information with employees, how you will receive feedback, and the resources that will be available to assist employees as the PWR plan is rolled out.



## Checklist

# Make Preparations for Employees to Return to the Workplace

- Inspect your workplace and create a list of deep cleaning activities, protective measures and retrofit work needed to meet pandemic health and safety requirements.
- Consider making facility enhancements such as increased fresh air circulation and installation of an improved filtering system.
- Schedule cleaning, protective and retrofit activities prior to the scheduled return of your employees.
- Establish policies, protocols and procedures related to safe social distancing in the workplace, including: placement of desks and office equipment in open areas; protective measures for in-person meetings; employees gathering in common areas; use of elevators and escalators; and screening of visitors (customers/clients/vendors/family members) in the workplace.
- Establish policies, protocols and procedures related to mandated protective measures employees and visitors must take to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including wearing protective face masks, submitting to temperature checks before entering the workplace, utilizing hand-washing stations, etc.
- Determine how you will safely and securely transfer data and information from home computers, personal storage, and consumer cloud services (used by employees working remotely) to office systems (records information management).
- Weave flexibility into your company's operational schedule by considering the possibility of staggering work hours and days, adjusting your hours of operation, and offering seniors and high-risk individuals exclusive work hours (early morning shifts, for example).
- Consider downscaling or placing a moratorium on all business travel—or at least non-essential travel—for a period of time.



## Checklist

# Develop your Workplace COVID-19 Protocol

- Determine steps your business will take if an employee experiences COVID-19 symptoms at work.
- Determine steps your business will take if an employee reports exposure to COVID-19 or receives a positive diagnosis.
- Develop a contact-tracing protocol to inform employees who have been in close contact with someone affected by COVID-19. This method must be in compliance with privacy and discrimination laws.
- Establish notification procedures if your business is required to report a COVID-19 case to authorities and/or to record it on your OSHA 300 log.
- Develop a workplace deep-cleaning and sanitizing protocol that is triggered by a COVID-19 report.
- Establish a communications plan to inform employees about COVID-19 reports in the workplace, and to respond to questions, concerns and suggestions.
- Develop a media response plan that is triggered when your company receives negative publicity or is contacted by the media regarding a COVID-19-related case or outbreak.





# Safeguarding Employees and Maintaining Compliance

During the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting employees in the workplace has taken on new meaning. Businesses must protect employees in the workplace, safeguard employees who work from home, and comply with federal, state and local regulations.

## Checklist

### Pandemic-Related Safety & Compliance

- Develop an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan
- Implement basic infection prevention measures
  - Promote frequent and thorough hand washing
  - Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes
  - Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles
  - Establish safe policies and practices, such as flexible worksites and work hours to promote social distancing strategies
  - Discourage employees from using others' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible
  - Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other elements of the work environment
  - Develop policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of sick employees
- Implement COVID-19-related strategies recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- Comply with new, existing and amended legislation that protects your employees' paid sick time and paid family and medical leave.
- Educate your company's furloughed and laid off workers about their eligibility for state and federal benefits, including federally-funded unemployment insurance programs that may provide benefits or extend workers' eligibility for benefits.
- Ensure compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission laws as they apply to preventing discriminatory practices in the workplace related to or resulting from the pandemic.
- Consider retaining a safety consultant to advise your team regarding COVID-19 measures.
- Provide COVID-19-related safety training and communications.
- Designate a point person to take the lead. Train managers on what to do if OSHA, police, public health officers, etc. show up onsite.



## Checklist

# General Safety & Compliance

- Review and revise your company's workplace health and safety program
- Perform a self-audit (or work with a consultant) to make sure your company is compliant with ALL relevant federal, state, and local workplace requirements, including but not limited to, OSHA, HIPAA, FMLA, FLSA, EEOC, ADA, ACA, and COBRA.
- Review relevant benefits laws that regulate plans, including:
  - Medical, dental, visual, psychiatric, or long-term health care
  - Pension plans and other retirement plans, including 401(k) or 403(b)
  - Severance benefits
  - Life insurance
  - Accidental death or dismemberment benefits
  - Unemployment, disability, vacations or holiday benefits
  - Internships and tuition assistance
- Prepare annual notices that your company is required to distribute to employees, such as a Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC) and COBRA General Rights and Elections Notices.



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives

To eliminate gender, racial and disability gaps, companies are implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives designed to foster major change in their workplaces. If your company doesn't currently have a DEI plan, it's a good idea to put one in place. If you do have a DEI plan, consider conducting an in-depth analysis to determine where you need to incorporate updates and changes.

## Checklist

### Recommended Steps in the Planning and Implementation of a DEI plan:

- Collect data on your current workforce demographics and identify strengths, weaknesses, areas of concern and trends. Create an employee focus group to gather feedback about their perceptions of the company and its culture.
- Design your DEI strategy and set goals. Review your company's policies and procedures to identify areas that conflict with your DEI strategy and make revisions where needed. Communicate the details of your plan to employees.
- Evaluate, audit and update your DEI plan frequently. Share outcomes with your employees and encourage participation, feedback and suggestions.
- Check your company's compliance with federal, state and local regulations that promote diversity in the workplace and monitor legislative efforts.
- Evaluate your company's recruiting and hiring practices to ensure they work hand-in-hand with your company's DEI initiatives. Key recommendations:
  - [Recruit beyond gender](#). Seek out candidates of diverse ages, races, cultural backgrounds, religions and gender identities.
  - Review and revise job postings to comply with DEI initiatives. Advertise on diverse job search platforms.
  - Review and revise your screening and interview processes so that you vet candidates with an unbiased, open mindset.
  - Create and implement an inclusive hiring and onboarding process.
- Implement a robust training program for managers so they can properly support employees and help create a culture that champions DEI initiatives. Provide ongoing diversity training for all employees.
- Establish consequences for policy violations and a resilient reporting process that incorporates a whistleblower policy that protects employees against retaliatory actions.
- Make a company pledge for a zero-tolerance, discrimination- and harassment- free workplace.



# Revise Policies, Procedures and Protocols

Established policies, procedures and protocols provide your organization and employees with a set of guiding principles and standards to ensure ethical behaviors, quality products and services, and a safe environment for your team and your customers.

## Checklist

- Create new policies and procedures—or revise existing—related to social distancing in the workplace.
- Create new policies and procedures—or revise existing—related to COVID-19 exposure, symptoms, diagnoses and prevention.
- Create new policies and procedures—or revise existing—related to remote work.
  - Develop a policy that addresses employee requests to work remotely after you have started implementing your company’s return to work plan.
  - Train managers and relevant personnel on these policies and associated protocols.
- Update your employee handbook to ensure it addresses such areas as employment law updates, new COVID-related policies, telecommuting, privacy policies, compensation and performance reviews, procedures for termination, workplace safety, and more.



# Recruiting, Hiring, Onboarding and Training

Whether they take place in person or online, your company's recruiting, hiring, onboarding and training programs should comply with regulations, adapt to our changing world and incorporate best practices.

## Checklist

- Create a strategic recruiting plan that includes goals for: job description development, candidate sourcing, applicant tracking, pre-hire assessments, interviewing, and maintaining legal compliance.
- Review the different practices your company adopted for recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and training during the pandemic, to determine which should continue moving forward.
  - Determine what changes your company needs to make to posting, screening, interviewing and onboarding processes to reflect safe and healthy practices.
  - Develop a robust virtual recruiting program.
  - Consider implementing a revised onboarding process for employees returning to work from furlough, or who are being rehired.
- Review your recruiting protocols. Ensure they in regulatory compliance and fit with your company's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives.
- Review your company's employee training program and make strategic and appropriate changes to your library of training topics.
  - Research federal, state, and industry workplace training requirements that apply to your business.
  - Determine if you are required to provide COVID-19 workplace safety training to employees.
  - Develop a comprehensive online training program. Work with a consultant if your company needs access to timely and current training courses.



# Company Payroll, Benefits and Insurance

Pre-pandemic, mid-pandemic or post-pandemic, your company's payroll, benefits and insurance management responsibilities continue. Processes may evolve with changing times, but the primary goal of protecting your employees' interests remains the same.

## Checklist

- If you're employees are transitioning from remote work, back into the office, verify that that they have recorded and submitted all time and expense forms for work performed remotely.
- Manage tax credits, filings and deferred tax payments.
  - Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), the federal government reimburses companies for costs associated with providing employees paid leave for reasons related to COVID-19. This became an optional benefit at the end of 2020 and the deadline to take advantage has since been moved to September 30, 2021, following passage of the [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#).
  - Distribute appropriate tax forms to individuals who received cash payments during 2020.
  - If your company deferred deposit and payment of your portion of Social Security taxes under the CARES Act, 50% of the deferred taxes were due by December 31, 2021, and the remaining 50% are due by December 31, 2022.
  - Manage new filing dates for tax filings and payments—federal, state, and local.
- Evaluate Employee Assistance Programs and mental health resources available to employees and what should be added/revised moving forward.
- Evaluate your company's current benefits package to consider what should be added/revised to meet your employees' needs, and to ensure you comply with pandemic-related issues and requirements, including:
  - Health and wellness plans: Many employees lost coverage during the pandemic. Provide re-enrollment opportunities and/or consider allowing employees to change their elections for healthcare flexible savings accounts (FSAs) and dependent care FSAs.
  - Defined contribution retirement plans (i.e., 401(k) plans): Review requirements for employees who are being rehired or returning from furlough to determine if you need to establish plan re-entry opportunities.
  - Defined benefit pension plans: Review requirements for employees who are returning from furlough to determine if you should amend the plan to credit employees for their furlough period.
- Review the FFCRA's requirements for extended paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave, and group health plans' mandated coverage of COVID-19 diagnostic testing.
- Review your company's insurance policies and Worker's Compensation plan to determine if you need to make revisions based on a shift to a remote work environment.



# Handy HR Forms and Resources

## Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services forms

<https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/CMS-Forms/CMS-Forms/CMS-Forms-List>

## Department of Labor forms

<https://www.dol.gov/general/forms>

## Employee Benefits Security Administration FAQs and forms

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ebsa/employers-and-advisers/plan-administration-and-compliance/reporting-and-filing/form-5500>

## Equal Employment Opportunity Commission forms

<https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/sample-alternative-dispute-resolution-forms>

## Federal Labor Relations Authority forms

<https://www.flra.gov/resources-training/resources/forms-checklists>

## Internal Revenue Service forms

<https://www.irs.gov/forms-instructions>

## National Institutes of Health forms

<https://oma.od.nih.gov/DMS/Pages/Forms-Management.aspx>

## National Labor Relations Board forms

<https://www.nlr.gov/guidance/fillable-forms>

## Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) publications

<https://www.osha.gov/pls/publications/publication.html>

## Social Security Administration forms

<https://www.ssa.gov/forms/>

## US Small Business Administration's Business Resource Center

<https://www.sba.gov/managing-business/forms%20>

