

Q&A: NRCAN Employee Engagement Sessions

April 26th – 29th, 2021

Equipping Employees

What process or tools will be put in place of printers and photocopiers, and how can employees reduce screen fatigue if printing from home is not an option?

Home printers pose security issues as most of them are wireless and using Wi-Fi. Printers will continue to remain available in buildings and printing solutions are being evaluated. Whenever possible, employees should favour paperless strategies and explore methods to reduce eye-fatigue.

How will we be equipped both at home and in the office to support a hybrid model, especially in different regions?

We are awaiting TBS guidance to provide more clarity on this.

What is the responsibility of the employee for the equipment acquired throughout the pandemic for home office use, as well as IT equipment taken from the office?

Equipment procured for employees' home use remains the property of the Government of Canada and employees are asked to treat this equipment as they would it at the workplace.

What is the process for returning home office equipment such as desks and chairs that were acquired during the pandemic?

Information on equipment returns will be communicated at a later date. We are currently asking employees who are leaving the department to retain the desk and/or chair they acquired and contact the COVID-19 mailbox.

How will Duty to Accommodate and employees with ergonomic assessments be accommodated in the workplace?

Employers and managers have the duty to accommodate employees whenever required regardless of their work location.

Are cloud-based computers being considered?

Cloud-based computers are being considered for the future.

Will a process be established for assigning IT equipment to ensure the needs of individual job requirements are met?

Yes, a strategy is currently being developed. Employees should communicate with their managers to discuss their specific needs related to work requirements.

Are conversations occurring on how to make "secret" level work possible from home (e.g. GCSI access, etc.)?

Yes - GCSI terminal extensions and additions are being considered in terms of location, range, cost, and the opportunity to leverage existing terminals across the country.

Health & Safety

Will we require proof of vaccination for re-entry into the workplace?

The President of TBS is encouraging all staff to get vaccinated once they are eligible. At this time,

vaccination is not a mandatory requirement before re-entry into the workplace.

What sanitary measures will be in place upon re-entry?

Cleaning protocols implemented throughout the pandemic will continue for the foreseeable future. Other measures could be introduced as required.

Human Resources

Will the job application process be revised to remove geographic boundaries and create more opportunities and increase talent pool?

Expansion of the 'area of selection' for our staffing process is an option that managers can consider for all current and future staffing actions.

Would there be positions or classifications that will be required to work in office and therefore not allowed to continue working from home?

Some functions could be required to work in the office due to the nature of the work.

Labour Relations

How is NRCan/the GoC working with unions to clarify how the collective agreements will align with the flexibility of the Future of Work?

The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) is currently reviewing the existing People Management Policies to ensure alignment with the future reality. As the employer, they also have the responsibility to negotiate with unions on future collective agreements. Internally, NRCan is working with bargaining agents to ensure a broader comprehension of employees' concerns.

Will there be a new telework agreement?

Most likely. NRCan is waiting for further guidance from TBS as this will be a common issue throughout the Federal Public Service.

Would there be guidelines to ensure that employees who work from home or in the office are treated fairly, free of discrimination, despite their work location?

There are already [guidelines and policies](#) to ensure employees can work without discrimination.

Will there be consistency between departments on the working from home approach?

Most departments are undergoing similar reflection on the Future of Work and as there could be differences on how they chose to address flexibility, there will be changes in most organizations. Furthermore, central agencies are working together to implement a mid to long term transformation in Workplaces, IT infrastructure and People Management.

Working & Managing Remotely

How can we restrict being connected 24/7?

Employees should not be connected 24/7 and must adopt healthy practices to maintain a balance between personal and professional life. Unless the nature of your work requires you to work outside of core hours, you should speak to your manager about setting boundaries and timelines, the [Best Practices for Remote Work Guide](#) can be used as a tool and as a point of discussion for team meetings.

How much discretion will managers have in deciding the in-office/telework balance? How can we ensure that our previously established flex schedules are honoured by new managers?

It is up to managers to make the decision but they will have to provide justification as to why telework is not possible for specific employees. Telework agreements are between a manager and their employee and would have to be reviewed and subject to approval when there is a change of manager.

What about when you work with a group in another time zone and it results in a longer work day?

Your workday should be during your core hours as set in your collective agreement. When working with people in a different time zone, all efforts should be made to plan meetings and discussions during common core hours.

What happens in a situation where all team members must be present to perform duties?

Operational requirements will dictate the requirement for employees to be on-site. There should be advanced planning of office space use according to the number of team members, tasks involved, etc.

When back in office, will managers have a responsibility to send employees home if they appear ill (with COVID or otherwise)?

Hopefully the experience from this pandemic will have showed us the risk of workplace transmission of viruses and will lead to employees with mild symptoms of a cold for example to work from home. When employees are really sick, they should take a day off. At this time, in a post-COVID-19 environment, managers do not have the authority to send an employee home. Communication around employees' responsibility towards the health and safety of others in the workplace will continue post-COVID.

Is there talk of "mandatory" in-person days for certain groups and what that kind of schedule would look like?

Such decisions will be based on operational requirements and work functions. Managers will make these decisions for their employees.

What options for a hybrid work model are being considered by management? Does the range go beyond the options displayed in this session's polls?

The options displayed were only examples of what could be possible, they are not exclusive. All options are on the table at this moment.

Will we be able to work from any location when working from home? i.e. from my second residence?

While there will be greater flexibility in terms of remote work location, it will remain subject to operational and security requirements. Provided the work location is safe, respects occupational health and safety requirements and has a secure and reliable internet connection, working from a secondary residence could be possible.

Many employees have loved ones/dependants outside of Canada - is there consideration about the barriers being created by removing overseas VPN access?

At this time, for security purposes, NRCan employees cannot work abroad. Working from a different region in Canada is possible.

Will personal circumstances be considered in decision-making in terms of how often an employee can work from home?

Yes, personal circumstances will be a consideration. However, some functions cannot be performed remotely and in those circumstances, employees may not have a choice.

For those of us who don't have the option of working from home, are there considerations for what flexibility might offer us?

Employees performing such functions should discuss flexibility considerations, if any, with their managers.

What if we don't know how much we are needed in the office until after we go back to the office? Will there be provisions for a check-in and re-evaluation after a certain period of time?

Just as we adjusted to the current situation, we will adjust to the new normal. We know that adjustments will have to be made along the way as people adapt and understand better the requirements and implications of a hybrid or virtual workplace. Keeping lines of communications open with your manager will be important as we navigate through workplace changes.

Mental Health & Wellness

How do we maintain the "watercooler" conversations and creativity if most people are working from home given the limitations of virtual tools?

Our [Best Practices for Remote Work Guide](#) has suggestions for how to schedule these types of interactions. In a virtual world, all of the impromptu social elements we experience in the office must be planned and time must be dedicated, as they are an important part of the social work culture and overall well being of employees. While it cannot be the same, we must consider new virtual ways to connect as more and more teams will be spread across different locations.

How do you deal with the lack of motivation from working "alone" from home?

During the pandemic, there is no choice to work from home for many of us. Post pandemic, employees who wish to return to the workplace because they feel alone at home, will be able to do so. That being said, managers should be particularly vigilant and stay in touch with all team members, even more so with those who struggle.

Real Property

What will happen to under-utilized office buildings and labs? Will employees who work in buildings under lease be asked to move to a different building location?

Public Services and Procurement Canada has started a portfolio assessment as part of a long-term management strategy that started pre-pandemic. As such, NRCAN will be doing a similar exercise with its own buildings, looking at our current use and our needs in the future. A lot of analysis, planning and discussions must take place before decisions are made in regards to buildings.

Will the physical work space be designed to better accommodate phone and video calls?

Yes - MS Teams calls are here to stay, and this is a major consideration in our re-entry to the workplace plans. Employees should all have webcam and headset for virtual meetings and specific space will be designed to take virtual meetings, including small rooms for private conversations.

What will the return to the office mean for those of us that had moved to an Activity Based Workplace (ABW) prior to the pandemic?

Workplaces will be designed for the type of activity people need to do. As such, activity-Based Workplace, now called GCworkplace is here to stay. Space such as the 15th floor at 580 Booth and the Burrard Building in Vancouver are previews as to what the future workspace could look like.

Will different departments have the opportunity to work together so that employees can use each other's buildings/IT infrastructure in different locations across the country?

This is Public Service and Procurement Canada's long-term vision. In the meantime, PSPC's pilot GCcoworking project will be available for employees to work from a different location.

How will employees be able to, for example, bike to work and store their belongings with no assigned spaces?

Employees who work in areas without assigned seating will be provided with storage options for personal effects.

What will the workplace physically look like when the Return to the Workplace is implemented? How will our buildings be retro-fitted?

Discussions are being held regarding transforming existing space, as well as leveraging other existing buildings, and potential shared spaces. Existing space will likely involve unassigned office space with enhanced meeting rooms and a variety of ergonomic equipment to accommodate employees while they are in-office. The upcoming survey will provide indications on workplace requirements and inform decisions.

Miscellaneous

What are the considerations for those with disabilities (specifically hearing) in terms of masks and their hindrance on the ability to communicate clearly in the office setting?

When it is time to return to the workplace, the requirement to wear facial masks will very likely be lifted. That being said, should employees still need to wear face coverings, NRCan has purchased masks with a clear window for teams who need them.

Will there be a future of work inbox? Who should we send questions to in the interim?

There is now a future of work mailbox, please direct your questions to nrcan.futureofwork-lavenirdutravail.nrcan@canada.ca.

What employee engagement opportunities will there be in the future, especially for those who did not attend this session?

We will continue to host information and engagement sessions periodically to check-in with employees, as well as collect the necessary feedback to make informed decisions as we continue towards the 'Future of Work'. We also encourage employees to forward any questions or concerns to the [Future of Work mailbox](#) anytime. Employees who could not attend the live sessions can still view them using [this link](#).

Will a strategy be planned for the reintegration of the employees of the subsequent phases (3, 4 and 5)? Do these phases need to be re-defined?

Decisions will be made according to each location, taking into account sanitary measures, building configuration and capacity, and advice from public health. There is no plan at this time to redefine the phases but depending on how things evolve, it is a possibility.

How can we share our experiences/concerns more easily with senior executives?

We encourage you to have conversations with your management and to take every opportunity provided to share your thoughts, such as the engagement sessions and twitter chats.

What commitment is management making to leverage the common themes in these discussions and show direction/take action that is aligned with this valuable input?

The information gathered here will be presented to the senior management committee, along with results from the upcoming survey. All employee feedback will be used to inform Senior Management's decisions on the future of work.

When will decisions be made that will effectively aid in planning our future careers at NRCan?

It is difficult to estimate a time at this moment as there are still many unknowns. In the meantime, you can have discussions with your manager about their expectations and your desires in a post-pandemic environment.