

Building a Gradual Return Plan

Background

In the spring of 2021, the Chamber set up "I love working downtown," a platform for relaunching downtown Montreal supported by the Ministère de l'Économie et de l'Innovation. As part of "I love working downtown," the Chamber launched a series of surveys called "Return to office towers," aimed at workers and employers in Greater Montreal.

The results of these surveys highlighted the importance of orderly and transparent planning for the return to the office of work teams.

To ensure the success of the process, it is imperative that employers have a gradual, safe, attractive and sustainable return plan in place.

This guide aims to provide managers with the tools they need to develop their return plan by presenting best practices that can be adapted to all types of organizations.

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*** The information is provided for information purposes only. Some of the recommendations may not be applicable or may need to be adapted to the specific context of your organization.



Planning

<p>Prepare teams for a return to the office and Plan a welcome meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with employees to find out how they feel about returning to work. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the new policies and procedures to employees at least two weeks before your reopening date. <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct an internal survey of teams to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the teams' expectations regarding the return to the office. - Determine the balance between office and remote work. - Understand employees' experiences during the pandemic. - Know their work preferences for the future. - Determine which type of work organization will favour their well-being. <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct focus groups to build consensus before presenting the action plan to the entire team. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify the most vulnerable staff members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immunocompromised employees - Employees over 60 years of age - Etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Determine the welcome meeting goals and messages to be communicated by including some of the following themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify expectations and concerns. - Clearly present measures and guidelines. - Present the communication mechanisms put in place. <input type="checkbox"/> During the welcome meeting, underscore accomplishments and hard work. <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize the work and engagement of employees.
<p>Employer's responsibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Implement COVID-19 prevention measures, provide essential hygiene supplies and ensure compliance with these measures. <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate your efforts with the organizations that share your building. <input type="checkbox"/> Define and communicate rules and policies using the most effective means for the organization. <p><i>** Employees are responsible for reviewing the return plan. They must take all precautions to protect their own and their colleagues' health, safety and physical integrity.</i></p>
<p>Plan for various scenarios</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Put in place several scenarios based on government authorities' recommendations. <input type="checkbox"/> Consult with employees for any updates and changes. <input type="checkbox"/> Support employees appropriately based on the selected scenario.

Communication and follow-up

<p>Internal communication</p> <p><i>** Download our internal communication plan</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create an employee committee to come up with new ideas on internal communications means and implement the selected measures. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide technological communication tools that allow remote and office workers to take part in hybrid meetings simultaneously. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a weekly newsletter and reassure staff by communicating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New policies, procedures, measures and guidelines - Regular updates for all employees - Organizational directions and operational decisions - Steps taken and context of the return - Inform staff about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). - Make communications attractive and include a call to action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click on clickable articles (which could redirect to an internal newsletter or to the intranet, for example). • Sign up for an internal initiative or event. - Question/survey staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the situations experienced. • Establish expectations and concerns. • Note accomplishments and hard work in order to share it later. - Focus on authenticity: add photos (of the office, teams, etc.) as well as fun elements. <input type="checkbox"/> Make strategic choices appropriate to your organization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal communication channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Intranet • Emails • Blogs • Instant messaging • Office television • Videoconferences • Individual meetings • Lunch and Learn - Formats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos • Visuals/Bulletin boards • Quick reference cards/Checklist • Webinars or online courses • FAQ/internal “toolbox” • Quizzes <input type="checkbox"/> Post signs and reminders (reminders of measures, policies, etc.) at entry points and key locations. <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule regular in-person meetings (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.) with each employee on an equitable basis. <input type="checkbox"/> Define clear and achievable communication objectives, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the organizational culture by developing a sense of belonging among employees and promoting retention.
<p>External communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establish external communication policies. <input type="checkbox"/> Define the ways in which employees should address customers and partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide tools to support communications with external partners.

<p>Follow-up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create a monitoring committee made up of managers and employees. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the return to work plan is carried out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a fair and consistent protocol. - Apply the protocol if the mandatory rules are not followed. <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the progress of current activities following the implementation of changes and modify measures or instructions as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occupancy rate - Employee engagement rate - Absenteeism - Turnover rate - Work climate - Impact on recruitment - Team morale - Productivity rate
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Work and physical space planning

<p>Organization of work arrangements and schedules</p> <p><i>Download the template to build your own hybrid policy!</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Quickly create a Hybrid Work Policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify groups of employees who would benefit from being at the office at the same time. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify days for when working at the office is essential (team meeting, new employee welcome, project launch, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule occupancy of the premises on an alternating basis (if needed). <input type="checkbox"/> Offer flexible work schedules. <input type="checkbox"/> Decide how the choices of days to work in the office will be made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual choice (each employee decides individually) - Subgroups (team split into subgroups) - Immediate team (the entire team is in the office on the same days) <input type="checkbox"/> Create team agendas or calendars to record telework/in-person days in advance. Make information available to the entire team. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign a resource person (per team, department, etc.) for the transition. <input type="checkbox"/> Adapt and diversify internal communication tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal communication channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Instant messaging • Intranet • Office television • Blogs - Formats : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos • Visuals • Webinars • Quizzes • Quick reference cards/Checklist • FAQ/internal “toolbox” • Surveys • Fixed-date scrums
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<p>Design of office and common areas</p> <p>See our tool suggestions</p> <p><i>How will your offices contribute to your organization's success?</i></p> <p><i>How to incorporate hybrid work effectively?</i></p> <p><i>How can you make the configuration of your spaces flexible so that you can make adjustments if necessary?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Quickly assess whether the current space meets your needs in terms of size. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the current space is not sufficient, then introduce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reservation system • An alternation principle • Disinfectants at workstations • Some spaces can be assigned to employees who work at the office full time. - If the current space exceeds needs, the organization can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the configuration of its offices. • Reduce or increase the size of its office space. • Add: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Conference rooms . Unassigned workstations . Collaborative workspaces . Wellness areas (e.g. a gym) • Rent its space as co-working spaces (to external organizations or workers). • Share space with other organizations. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider sit-stand workstations to provide additional ergonomic options. <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange conference rooms to facilitate meetings between remote employees and those at the office. <input type="checkbox"/> Transform rooms for in-person sessions that engage collective intelligence (brainstorming, creativity meetings, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create collaborative spaces. - Create multipurpose rooms. <input type="checkbox"/> Define physical distancing rules (in accordance with government recommendations): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In workspaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide distance between each desk. • Plan if offices cannot be occupied. • Reduce the number of seats in meeting rooms. - In common areas (elevators, reception, hallways, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make narrow hallways one-way. • Define limits for tight spaces (elevators, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Define or improve the list of equipment required by workstation, according to roles and responsibilities, while considering ergonomic factors (e.g. headphones, laptop, ergonomic chair, screens). <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the possibility of providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellness spaces (gym, games room, break room, etc.) - Closed focus spaces
<p>Physical distancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workspaces - Breaks and meals 	<p><i>In accordance with government recommendations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use a physical barrier or wear a high-quality mask when physical distancing is not possible. <input type="checkbox"/> Restrict the number of people in the workplace. <input type="checkbox"/> Favour small, stable teams and keep the same groups of workers.

<p><i>** Can be difficult to comply with in common areas, dining rooms, hallways, stairways and elevators.</i></p> <p>See <u>our suggestions</u> in this regard.</p>	<p>Breaks and meals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that physical distancing measures are applied during breaks and meal periods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modify meal period schedules to maintain a limited number of workers in the dining room at all times. - Ensure that the same groups of workers eat at the same time. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove non-essential items (magazines, newspapers, knick-knacks) from common areas. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that workers have access to rooms large enough to allow for a minimum distance. Provide additional rooms as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid sharing food and objects (e.g. cigarettes, pencils, cell phones). <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that there is sufficient disinfectant available at all times.
<p>Traffic jams and narrowing of traffic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify spaces that act as bottlenecks (e.g. building entrance, cafeteria entrance, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding the creation of close lineups. <input type="checkbox"/> Stagger work, break and meal times as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Organize schedules to control the number of people in the same place at the same time. <input type="checkbox"/> Install multiple hand sanitizer gel dispensers to avoid creating additional bottlenecks.

Wellness and “employee experience”

<p>Employee experience and organizational culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Define and adopt a “tele-etiquette” – “codes” and rules of civility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Behaviours expected of team members - Communications (time of sending emails, etc.) - Develop a culture of solidarity and social support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster collaborative work. • Promote respectful rather than discriminatory behaviour. - Involve employees and value their participation in the development of new “codes of conduct.” <input type="checkbox"/> Strengthen team bonding by organizing optional internal events. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider sit-stand workstations to provide additional ergonomic options. <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange conference rooms to facilitate meetings between remote employees and those at the office. <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the possibility of providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellness spaces (gym, games room, break room, etc.) - Closed focus spaces <input type="checkbox"/> Offer flexible work schedules and support work/life balance.
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<p>** Reflect on the type of leadership to adopt in hybrid work management.</p> <p><i>When teleworking, the little non-verbal that remains is subject to greater interpretation by colleagues.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Consider financial issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer financial compensation for travel. - Provide meals for employees. - Offer an amount for clothing. <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain or adapt good practices established during lockdown to sustain team spirit. <input type="checkbox"/> Consult with teams to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand employees' experiences during the pandemic. - Know their work preferences and expectations for the future. - Determine which type of work organization will favour their well-being. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer access to a virtual care platform (e.g. Dialogue). <input type="checkbox"/> Support managers in changing responsibilities (take pressure off, provide tools, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Redefine your "employer brand." What is the added value for workers? <p>Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Refine digital training tools. <input type="checkbox"/> Reserve development time for workers (reading, learning, etc.) and give them the right to learn.
<p>Mental and psychosocial health</p> <p>** How to prevent psychological distress among workers?</p> <p>** What actions should be taken to prevent psychological distress among workers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Implement transparent internal communication strategies and communicate clear guidelines. <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize the efforts made by staff in order to highlight achievements later on. <input type="checkbox"/> Make mental health resources and support available. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer webinars or online advice to allay fears. <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage empathy and caring within work teams. Be tolerant and forgiving of one another. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer flexible work schedules to allow for a gradual recovery according to the needs of teams and the organization. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify difficulties and seek solutions as a team. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide the organization with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If one already exists, be sure to inform staff about the EAP. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider financial stress issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer financial compensation for travel. - Provide meals for employees. - Offer an amount for clothing. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish the need for the adoption or not of the right to disconnect. If it exists, promote it.

Health and safety

<p>Infection control measures</p> <p><i>** Compliance with the standards included in the Workplace Guide to Sanitary Standards - COVID-19</i></p> <p>See also our suggestions in this regard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Appoint ambassadors and resource persons who know and apply the guidelines. <input type="checkbox"/> Define the guidelines for access to your facilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain a register of people onsite. - Establish guidelines for visitors. - Establish protocols and entry access conditions (according to updated government recommendations: mask, vaccine passport, hand washing, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Define a procedure for reporting unsafe situations. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish an Engagement Policy regarding measures to be taken if potentially dangerous situations arise. <input type="checkbox"/> Create and communicate workplace health guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical distancing - Hand hygiene - Respiratory etiquette - Environmental health - Avoidance of direct contacts (handshakes, hugs) - Wearing a mask in the workplace (if needed). <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain air quality and ventilation system status data. Make the necessary modifications to prevent aerosol transmission. <p>Triage of symptomatic workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a procedure for excluding symptomatic individuals. <input type="checkbox"/> Advise workers to stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms (if needed). <input type="checkbox"/> Use a symptom questionnaire to support worker triage. <i>Note that this questionnaire includes guidelines to help employers identify at-risk contacts in their environment.</i> <p>Cleaning and disinfection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Determine frequently touched equipment and objects (e.g. handles, switches) and recommend cleaning procedures (e.g. end of shift, daily). <input type="checkbox"/> Provide cleaning products (e.g. disinfectant wipes) so that employees can clean their space before and after use.
<p>Ergonomics</p> <p>See also our suggestions in this regard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create an internal video (or other format) on ergonomics and appropriate, safe home office design. <input type="checkbox"/> Wherever possible, provide employees with the required equipment and ensure the compliance of the set-up at workers' homes. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the following tips: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid working in front of a window to avoid eyestrain. - Stretch frequently and alternate between standing and sitting to avoid a static posture and thus prevent most associated ailments. - Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and look at something 6 metres (20 feet) away. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider sit-stand workstations to provide additional ergonomic options.

Sources :

The recommendations made are based on the following sources:

- [Gradual Return to the Workplace | Commission des normes de l'équité de la santé et de la sécurité du travail - CNESST \(gouv.qc.ca\)](#) (in French only)
- [Guide to Transitioning to Hybrid Work \(carrefourrh.org\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Toolkit: Guide and Tools | Commission des normes de l'équité de la santé et de la sécurité du travail - CNESST \(gouv.qc.ca\)](#)
- [CRHA - Managing the Return to Work - Information and Recommendations for Employers](#)
- [What Are Your Return-to-Work Policies? \(in French only\) | Espresso-Jobs](#)
- [Planning the Gradual Resumption of Activities: How to Promote Psychological Health After Lockdown > IRSST: Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail](#) (in French only)
- [Documentation - Coronavirus - Université de Sherbrooke \(usherbrooke.ca\)](#) (in French only)
- [Toolbox for the Operation of Office Buildings in the Context of COVID-19 \(in French only\) - Institut de développement urbain du Québec - office buildings \(boma-quebec.org\)](#)
- [Administrative Work - Enhanced Measures \(inspq.qc.ca\)](#) (in French only)