CENTRALINA READY TO RESTART
Local Government Planning Guide

Throughout the Coronavirus crisis local governments across the Centralina region adjusted operations to provide essential services, information and emergency response. As we begin to ramp up in-person municipal and county operations in an era of our "new normal," we encourage our members to consider these five steps as you plan to reopen and to comply with federal, state and local guidelines.

#1	**#2**	**#3**	**#4**	**#5**
Start with People	Prep Your Space	Update Your Policies & Procedures	Communicate Clearly	Test, Evaluate & Adjust

#1 Start with People

Effective planning for reopening public facilities starts with understanding who needs to walk through the front door, why and when over the three phases of reopening as defined by Governor Cooper in alignment with federal standards. As we enter phase one, we recommend the following person-centric planning framework to keep your staff and visitors safe and healthy.

First, identify stakeholders or user groups to determine the purpose and frequency of in-person visits to your municipal and county buildings. Then, strongly consider if their needs can continue to be served through scheduled appointments, online or virtual means. If in-person access is necessary, determine which reopening phase to reintroduce each group. Then, prioritize planning for building or policy changes as outlined in steps two and three below.

Featured Tool: Stakeholder Mapping

Using a simple table, list out the major user groups or stakeholders that regularly visit or work in your public building. For larger organizations, you may have a table for each department. Don't get lost in the details; rather use this to organize and analyze information at a high level and identify priority groups for more detailed planning by reopening phase. Here's a sample!

Example User Groups	General Purpose and Frequency of In-Person Access	Continued Online or Virtual Access?	In-Person Access Priority: Phase 1, 2 or 3
Members of the public			
Elected officials			
Non-essential workforce			
External partners and professional contractors			
Service providers, vendors, deliveries			

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#2 Prep Your Space

Understanding which stakeholder groups need in-person access to your public buildings and in what phase is an important step to preparing for reopening. Physical spaces may need to be temporarily or permanently altered to accommodate social distancing, sanitization and federal and state guidelines.

This section focuses on physical changes, but changes to policies and procedures in step three are closely related. Given limited resources, managers may pursue these steps simultaneously to determine if the intended outcomes can be achieved either through changes in behavior or building alterations.

First, identify these common types of spaces in your public buildings either in a list or by labeling a floor plan:

- **Public areas**: high-traffic, accessible areas where members of the public come to conduct business, get information or speak with staff. Restrooms and large meeting spaces may also be in this publicly accessible zone.
- **Employee workspaces & common areas**: Typically access controlled or designated areas of the building with employee offices, workspaces and meeting rooms. Common areas can include restrooms, breakrooms or lunch-rooms, copier or printer rooms and supply or storage areas.
- **Transitional spaces**: These spaces can include hallways, stairwells, elevators or other areas of physical transition for either the public, employees or both.
- **Functional "back of the house" areas**: Larger buildings may have loading docks, janitorial areas, trash disposal areas, etc. that service providers access or where vendors make deliveries.

Next, take a tour to assess your existing conditions. Pair up or engage a team of essential employees to pitch in. Diversity within the team will ensure that you get a range of perspectives on areas of concern. The team should scan for problem areas related to social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting and occupancy. *Get copies of the floor plan or make a checklist to scan for the following:*

- Which high-touch surfaces will require cleaning and which require disinfecting?
- Do you have existing cleaning wipes or hand-sanitizer stations? Where are they located?
- Which employee workspaces are / are not social distance compliant?
- Are there barriers or windows at public service counters?
- Where are the pinch points in transitional spaces that would bring people closer than six feet?
- Can interior or stairwell doors be safely propped open?
- How many chairs and access points are in each conference room?
- Are there existing occupancy limitations in certain rooms or areas of the building?

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Develop a plan and a punch list. Revisit your user group priority access list (step one), the types of spaces in your building and the results of your tour. Develop a plan for each type of space and corresponding punch list of things to do to prepare for reopening. *Things to consider:*

- Do you need to purchase supplies or obtain cleaning services to be compliant with state guidelines and CDC reopening guidance for cleaning and disinfecting?
- What alterations are needed to rooms or workstations to comply with social distancing? Are they temporary or permanent? Are there policies or procedures that we could use to limit contact in lieu of alternations?
- What signage do we need to describe access, circulation patterns and maximum occupancy?
    - Resource: NC "Know Your W's" and Maximum Occupancy templates
- Do you need to set occupancy limits on conference rooms? Note: between 28-36 square feet is needed per person for effective social distancing.

Required Reading!

1. CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes:
   https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html
2. OSHA: Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
   https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf
3. North Carolina COVID-19 Guidance for Business (Phase One as of May 5, 2020)
   https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/covid19/covid-19-guidance

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#3 Update Your Policies & Procedures

The COVID-19 crisis response has already challenged local governments to quickly pivot and adopt new policies and corresponding procedures, such as Emergency Paid Sick Leave and teleworking. Reopening will pose similar challenges for local governments as they consider new ways of doing business. *Each local government will be different, but many will face similar policy choices such as:*

- Will we continue to encourage telework through all phases?
- Will we require employees and visitors to wear facing coverings if they cannot reasonably maintain a social distance?
- Will we require daily temperature screening of employees?
- Will we employ a rotating schedule or shifts if social distancing is not feasible?
- Will we require staff to disinfect their workspaces and personal belongings each day?
- Will we restrict the use of high-contact common area objects, such as printers and refrigerators?

The corresponding procedures to implement new policies will also be unique to each local government, however, Centralina is interested is sharing good practice among members. *Please let us know if you have a COVID-19 related policy or procedure to share with us.*
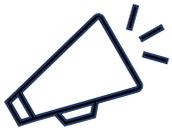
#4 Communicate Clearly

Effective and consistent communication is essential so that stakeholders understand what you expect of them when they re-enter your public buildings and what they can expect from you in terms of keeping them safe. In some communities there is high anxiety about reopening and returning to work. The more transparent and proactive you can be about what you are doing, the greater the confidence your stakeholders will have.

Develop a communications plan organized by your stakeholder groups or by phase of reopening. Public Information Officers (PIO) are experts in developing messaging and disseminating information. For local governments without a PIO, utilize the communication channels that are most comfortable to you and are known by your audience. Keep messages clear and to the point. *Be specific about requirements or expectations for visiting public buildings so that people can prepare for their visits*. For vendors and service providers, set expectations about building access and be transparent about any procedure changes; expect two-way communication so that you understand what steps they are taking to keep their clients safe.

Here are some considerations for internal communication with your non-essential employees returning to work:
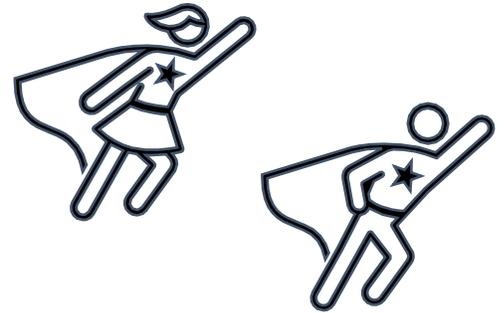
- **Give notice**: most employees are in a rhythm of working from home so give them ample notice about changes to work pattern and schedule.
- **Send in advance**: send information electronically about schedule shifts and changes to building access, policies and procedures.
- **Encourage dialogue**: host a virtual all-staff meeting to review changes, discuss what employees can expect and invite questions. Share your plan for evaluation and feedback loops so that employees can expect adjustments.
- **Be aware**: EEOC has released guidance on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act compliance, including the requirement for reasonable accommodation and rules about medical examinations and inquiries.
- **Be flexible**: the complexity of this crisis impacts each of us differently. Empower managers to work with employees to understand their needs and approach how to accommodate them.

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#5 Test, Evaluate & Adjust

If we have learned anything in the last several months, it is that there is no playbook for what is coming next. The best we can do as local government leaders is make sound decisions in the public interest based on available information and strategic analysis. The best plans are those that can be evaluated and adjusted overtime.

Consider building in regular feedback loops with your stakeholders and user groups to determine what is working and what needs to be adjusted. Remember, there is a lot of fear and anxiety out there. Consider both practical questions and those that ask your employees about their overall sense of well-being back in the office.

Here are some ways to get feedback:

- Consider short online **pulse check surveys** to get honest feedback at regular intervals from employees.
- **Encourage open communication** between employees and management via open discussion at staff meetings, one-on-one engagement or a suggestion box.
- If you are conducting in-person business at service counters, have employees **ask about customer experience** and level of comfort in the building before check-out.

Need Help? Want Feedback?

If you would like help in talking through a reopening plan or getting feedback on a plan you have developed, reach out to us! We're happy to consult with member governments about their reopening plans, policies and procedures:

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