

Remote and Telework Resources for Government: A Crash Course during Covid19

A collection of resources for transitioning government workers to remote and distributed teams. Please note, this document is a work in progress and will be updated.

Why government should start working from home and self isolating NOW

Transitioning to a remote office is a daunting task for any government agency, but it is imperative that every office in the country take whatever measures they can to do it. This is a time that requires quick action and decisive leadership, and the most important thing for us all to do is [flatten the curve of the epidemic](#) so that our health systems can cope and to give time for the scientists to research vaccines and treatments.

Additionally, now is the time we need our government the most. Like the safety videos played before takeoff on an airplane, you need to secure our own “oxygen masks” first before assisting others. If government staff are sick themselves, they won’t be able to do the critical work that is needed in the coming weeks and months.

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Building a Successful Telework Program and Practice

The most successful transitions to a telework program is when all staff transition together at once, so you're off to a great start. However, it's easy for a telework program to fail due to team culture and trust issues. To avoid common pitfalls it's suggested you focus on developing a robust program around the following three areas: (1) publish official telework policies (2) select appropriate software and hardware tools and support adoption of these tools and (3) establish new expectations and cultural norms for staff teleworking. Below you can find resources for each of these areas as well as tips for managing staff, working from home yourself, and developing a security program to make sure staff and constituents are protected.

Publish Official Telework Policies: Guides & Policies published by Government Agencies

Every line of documentation saves an email, a phone call, and a confused or anxious staffer. Focus on making sure your official policy is easily accessible, available publicly online is best, you are a public agency after all. Policies should be actionable, staff should have all the information they need to request approval to telework and request hardware or software to do their job. Keep official policies updated, adding new content as staff has additional questions not already documented.

Below find links to guides and policies from government agencies, we've called out a few that are especially well done.

Exemplary Guides & Policies

- [MBTA Official Guidance](#) (Boston, MA Public Transit)
- [18F's best practices for making distributed teams work](#)
- [Metro Los Angeles' Telework Guidebook](#) (audience is general, aim to reduce single occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel in the Los Angeles region)

Policies by State

- California
 - [California Department of General Services - Statewide Telework](#)
 - [California Department of Human Resources - Telework policy](#)
 - [New telecommuting guidance for California state workers for coronavirus outbreak](#)
 - [Metro Los Angeles' Telework Guidebook](#) (audience is general, aim to reduce single occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel in the Los Angeles region)
 - County of Los Angeles
 - [Telework Landing Page](#). Includes links to policy, manual, telework agreement, supervisor checklists, and a home safety checklist.
 - City of Los Angeles
 - [Personnel Guidance for establishing department telework program](#), [Telework application](#)
 - Headline: 20200402 - GCN - [From 12 to 12,000: How LA scaled up telework in two weeks](#)
 - New Work for Home Web Portal: <https://connect2lacity.org/>
 - City of Long Beach
 - [Working from Home](#) Guide to tools
- Massachusetts
 - [MBTA Official Guidance](#) (Boston, MA)
 - [Telework for Commonwealth Employees](#)
 - [Due to the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) we are waiving certain provisions of the Executive Department Telework Policy](#)
- Nebraska
 - [Nebraska State Government Guidelines](#) published 2016
- North Dakota
 - [Policies and sample agreement form](#)
- Vermont State Government
 - [Telework Eligibility and Request Form](#)
 - [Remote Ergonomics: Tips and Tricks at Home](#)
 - [Remote Work Tips](#)

Federal Policies

[Telework.gov](#) interagency resource published by OPM

- US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (Federal)
 - [Telework FAQs](#).
- NASA
 - [NASA's Coronavirus Response Page](#)
 - [Telework Program Overview](#) published 2019
 - [Ames on MANDATORY Telework and Restricted Access Notice](#) 3/9/2020
- U.S Department of Defense (DOD)
 - [Official Guidance, DoD Instruction](#) 1035.01, April 4, 2012 (pdf)
 - US Navy
 - [telework landing page](#) and link to request form
 - Navy policy update Feb 2019 [SECNAV INSTRUCTION 12271.1](#)
 - [JAG Policy](#)
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
 - [Telework Policy](#) (last updated 2015)
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
 - [GAO Report on needed improvements to VA's Telework policy](#) published 8/7/2017
- U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)
 - [18F's best practices for making distributed teams work](#)
- U.S Department of Justice (DOJ)
 - [HR & Telework landing page](#)

Select, Configure, and Deploy Software Tools

Often moving to telework requires new tools to replace the in-person, self-hosted, or other ways your team previously communicated and collaborated. Now is also a good time to consider not just how these tools can replace previous methods but actively improve efficiencies for your team.

General advice for selecting software tools,

1. Make a quick list of your essential and nice to have features, and compare what's on the market. Where possible, we've started some of these comparisons in spreadsheets, based on feature lists shared by different agencies.
2. Always make sure to check and double check your agency will maintain the rights to your own data, any data you generate within the software platform, the software platform will not resell your data or use it in anyway that is unnecessary (ie: anonymous analytics data are usually ok), and that you have the right to export your data at any point for no additional cost in a format that is useable for your agency.

Compiler is continuing to create software tool comparisons to help you quickly figure out what tools will work best for your agency's needs. Here's all of the existing comparisons todate:

- [Video Conferencing and Webinar Software for Governments](#)
- [Software Comparison: Project Management Tools](#)
- [Service Comparison: USA Based Virtual Mail Service](#)

General Tools by Category

Video Conferencing Software for Meetings

- [Video Conferencing and Webinar Software for Governments](#) - Spreadsheet comparison on videoconferencing and webinar software

Webinars, Video Broadcasting, or Live Streaming Software

- [Video Conferencing and Webinar Software for Governments](#) - Spreadsheet comparison on videoconferencing and webinar software

Screen and Video Recording Software

These tools are especially useful if you want to create a saved tutorial for how to use a tool, or complete a task.

- [Loom](#) - has a free tier. [Covid19 response pricing and increasing limits](#)

Project Management (aka task management or todo list tools)

Selecting project management software can be complicated and costly. First figure out what features are going to be essential to helping your team work more efficiently, and especially consider any features that reduce participation -- to be effective project management tools need to be adopted and used comprehensively by everyone contributing to your project. Every software was designed with a different audience in mind, need something super simple to track tasks for a quick period of time, or do you need something complex to display project status info to a large group of stakeholders? Each of these software platforms is best for a different scenario. Formalize processes for onboarding your team to new programs and open up conversations about best practices for use. It can be costly in both dollars spent but in frustration and pushback from your coworkers if the tool increases their workload or duplicates efforts they are already doing.

We've started documenting the pricing, privacy, and security of some common project management tools. So far those tools are [Trello](#), [MeisterTask](#), [Asana](#), [Jira](#), [Monday.com](#), and [Teamwork](#). The second tab of this document compares some of these same tools and others based on common features needed for managing software development projects. Please feel free to request we add additional software tools or specific features to the comparison.

- [Software Comparison: Project Management Tools](#)

Sprint Planning tools for Agile Software Management

Many of these project management tools specific to collaborating while building software are designed to be extended to cross collaborative teams that have separate but related non software or code tasks such as

managing outreach campaigns. If you have an inhouse software development team, see if they are already using these tools and if the best solution might be adopting the same tool for you team to manage their work.

We've started documenting some of the most used features by agile software teams across the most common sprint planning tools. So far that list includes [Trello](#), [MeisterTask](#), [Asana](#), [Jira](#), [Pivotal Tracker](#) and [ClubHouse](#). Please feel free to request we add additional software tools or specific features to the comparison.

- [Software Comparison: Project Management Tools](#) (Tab 2).

If you need a free sprint planning tool now, these are our favorites we've used before.

- [Pivotal Tracker](#) - Free up to 3 users.
- [GitHub Projects](#) - Limited features, but free for open source repositories (publically viewable).
- [ClubHouse](#) - Free up to 10 users.

Shared Document Creation and Management

- [G Suite / Google Docs](#)
- [Microsoft 365](#)
- [DropBox](#)

Team Chat

For chat programs pay special attention to requirements around records retention. Chat records are subject to information act requests. The admin settings in most paid chat have features to set record retention rules. It's recommended you look to the enterprise software you already pay for and see if there's an included or add on chat product -- these products will often include integration with the enterprise email or document services you already use.

- [Microsoft Teams](#) - Currently offered for free in response to the coronavirus outbreak.
- [Google Hangouts Chat](#) - free for G Suite customers.
- [Slack](#) - Standalone chat product, integrations with a significant number of third party applications.

Time Tracking

Not recommended unless you have a specific business case to track hours and/or are replacing lost access to a self-hosted system. Again if you don't already track hours, now is probably not a good time to start.

- [Toggl](#) - A simple to use tool, with robust reporting features and a significant number of integrations. Free for teams up to 5, with unlimited projects, starts at \$9 per user per month after free tier.
- [Harvest](#) - Comparable to Toggl. Free tier includes 1 person and 2 projects, starts at \$12 per user per month after free tier.

HR and Management

- [Team Retro](#), run retro meetings and pulse surveys aka health checks

Government Specific Software Tools by Category

Configurable tools for forms or workflows

- [CityGrows](#)
- [CityBase](#)

City Council Meetings & Agendas

- [Councilmatic](#) Open-source council meetings and agenda web tool.
 - Customized version [deployed for Metro Los Angeles](#) by DataMade!

Placemaking / Urban Planning / Citizen Engagement

- [Just Spaces](#), open-source placemaking app built for UCD in Philly by DataMade
 - [How University City District, Philadelphia is defining and measuring 'justice' in public space](#) - Brookings

Establish expectations and new cultural norms

If your staff is new to teleworking, or doesn't already have established cultural norms around how to conduct themselves in a new online work environment -- take the time to document those expectations now. For example, adopt a formal code of conduct or expand your existing code of conduct to include telework specific interactions

Code of Conduct for behavior online

Codes of conduct are an opportunity to reflect company values and operations, they should be easy to understand, comprehensive, accessible and reflected across all company members, especially leadership. Codes of Conduct shouldn't feel like "rules" but common shared values and understandings.

- For our purposes, we are focusing on codes of conduct for online behavior, this includes email, chat rooms, video, and other general rules

SAMPLE CODE OF CONDUCT

Overview

As our company expands remote working it is a necessity that we all understand and utilize tools in respectful and socially responsible ways. The ability to communicate with each other via multiple channels creates an opportunity for dynamic connection and team accountability. As these tools are or resemble tools we use in our daily lives outside of work, it is important that we all have a clear understanding and distinction of how we use them in the workplace to improve productivity, team connection and safety.

Online Behavior

The Internet is an extension of society and should center values that we utilize in our everyday public lives. We center courtesy, kindness, openness and respect. We refuse to participate in online harassment and abuse, and acknowledge that laws governing ours and others dignity and respect apply online as well.

Email

Email messaging has become the dominant form of business communication, here are some tips on how to utilize it properly:

- Be informal, but not sloppy - Emails reflect you and your company, while you and your colleagues might have a shorthand, when communicating with external clients it is important to follow standard writing protocols and grammar
- Keep messages concise and action driven
- Remember, email is not private, keep your subjects on point and professional
- Tone doesn't always transfer - Email often obscures tone and the nuances of verbal communication, be mindful when reviewing emails and confirm your message is coming across
- Acknowledge that everyone's communication style and reply time is different - You can always follow up or communicate in a different way

Chat

Chat messaging systems allow for immediate communication and response. It's all about speed, here's some additional tips when using chat

- Be mindful of extra punctuation and caps for effect, while sometimes this casual communication can be fun, it can get out of hand, strike a balance that feels professional and personable
- Emojis are great for adding meaning to language, Utilize them sparingly and with purpose.
- Abbreviate with intention
- Chat can sometimes be ambiguous, assume positive intent.
- Be clear and transparent
- Like email, everyone's communication style and reply time is different. You can always follow up or communicate in a different way

Video Calls

Video conferencing gives an opportunity to see everyone in the room. For remote workers and all of us currently working in crisis, meetings are essential to maintaining connection with our colleagues. Video meetings provide an exciting opportunity to utilize time effectively and purposefully. When using video conferencing, you should:

- Test your equipment - Make sure all your settings are appropriate before the meeting
- Have an agenda - Video, while more personal than other communication forms can also feel

disembodied and more quickly tiresome, have an exacting agenda and limit the length of your meetings

- Be prepared - Have all your materials ready and accessible so to continue the meeting on schedule
- Report your absence - If you are unable to attend a video meeting, report your absence to your supervisor or if you have to leave early, acknowledge that as well.

Overall

Remote working should not feel isolating and communication between team members is critical to team success. Utilizing these tools effectively and responsibly connects us in a deeper way that allows for better work and a better time at work.

Document expected norms

Individual and Group Calendars

Moving to a 100% telework environment means your calendars become essential. Do you expect staff to negotiate meeting times for every meeting? Or book open time on coworkers calendars when they need to discuss work? Do you expect staff to be prompt to video calls? Document and establish a shared set of rules

Here's an example policy for a Employee Handbook for an organization using Google Calendar:

Calendaring & Timezones

As a remote first company, addressing how we conduct ourselves using calendaring and virtual meetings is essential to enable each other to do good work in a timely manner. We seek to avoid blocking others by holding unnecessary time on their calendar, missing critical conversations, or being late to such conversations.

When working at XXX we seek the follow these guidelines around calendars:

Share:

- When creating a calendar invite, make the edit permissions as permissive as possible.
- Default to using shared calendars, example: "YYY"

Content:

- Every meeting has an owner.
- Every meeting has an agenda - attached or linked to from calendar invite.
- Use descriptive meeting titles!
- Share location or conference details in advance and make sure they are clear. ex: don't add both a

conference call in and a video call if both won't be used.

- Change your default Google Calendar settings to “auto allow attendees to edit calendar invites,” this reduces back and forth and allows others to update changes to venue, agenda, etc without waiting on the meeting organizer to do it.

Scheduling:

- When discussing potential meeting times, always include timezone information
- Use [HOLD] as necessary when negotiating calendar times
- Use [TRAVEL] if you are literally travelling but may be available for calls
- Keep your calendar responses accurate and up to date.
- Use the Out of Office Calendar feature as appropriate, make sure the decline message includes the duration of your away time.
- Keep your own calendar accurate and up to date.
- This includes copying over busy information from personal calendars. Ex: blocking off time as busy when you have a doctor's appointment.

Attending:

- Be punctual!
- Communicate immediately if you aren't able to attend a meeting or will be late
- Make sure meetings end on time. Others might have full calendars! If you need/want something to run over make sure everyone on the call is available to stay
- When available, use video features to better stay connected and show respect to others by being especially present.

Additional Resources:

- Very thorough guide: [Google Calendar for Administrative Assistants](#)

Dealing with Timezones

Hosting Online Meetings, Events, and Trainings

Blogs

- [Delivering lean training. virtually](#) - Alexandra Rodney and Anthony Longo, Ontario Digital Service
- [Accessible Virtual Meetings](#) - Noelle Campbell-Smith, Ontario Digital Service
- [Running an effective virtual meeting](#) - Jeroen Amin, Ontario Digital Service
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Videos/ Recorded Webinar

- [How to do Remote Events in the Time of COVID-19](#) - Apolitical recorded webinar, date unknown

Guides / Downloadable pdfs

- [How to do Remote Events in the Time of COVID-19](#) - Apolitical 23pg pdf guide

Managing: resources for those new to managing staff remotely and tips for managing in a crisis

- Professional Coaching & Workshops
 - [Wherewithall](#) - Highly recommended management coaching firm founded by Lara Hogan, former CTO of Etsy who's now a management coach. Lara also publishes a [fantastic newsletter about management](#) and has lots of [free printable resources templates](#) covering everything from running one-on-one check-in meetings with staff to tracking compensation and promotion inequity.
 - [Design Department](#) - A firm specializing in helping leaders in design, Design Department typically hosts in-person leadership workshops for those learning to manage better or manage remotely. Currently they are offering discounted pricing on their management workshops as zoom classes.
- Books and Blogs
 - [Resilient Management](#) by Lara Hogan
 - [Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity](#) by Kim Scott
 - [Leading Distributed Teams](#) - Sarah Jackson, Ontario Digital Service
 - [Running an effective virtual meeting](#) - Jeroen Amin, Ontario Digital Service
 - [Working Remotely](#) - Skaidra Puodziunas, Ontario Digital Service
 - [Work Rules!](#) by Lazlo Bock, former HR director for Google
- Videos and Podcasts
 - Scaling Software Teams [Podcast: Becoming A Resilient Manager with Laura Hogan](#)
 - [Panel Discussion: Leading teams through times of uncertainty and upheaval](#)
- Establish policies and a culture that supports staff in a crisis, such as:
 - Allow and / or encourage flexible working hours.
 - Create a single document for employees that's constantly updated with new information related to the emergency, *assign an owner to the document responsible for updating it*. This can be as simple as a shared internal document, or an external website such as the excellent [NASAPeople Coronavirus Response Page](#).
 - Be transparent whenever possible.
- Research and share with staff personal resources for living in a crisis
 - Examples:

- [Free Headspace Meditation app for anyone physically within LA County](#)

Tips and Tricks for Working Remote for Individuals

Most recommendations fall into two categories, how to adjust to your new environment or productivity tools that would be relevant regardless of the location you are working in.

First, focus on creating a physical and mental environment that promotes the ability to focus, things like consistent daily routines, work hours, and a comfortable ergonomic workspace.

Set up your physical workspace

- Set up an ergonomic workspace. Check the height of your chair, keyboard, screen, and feet on the floor using best practices. [LA County's Telework Location Home Safety Checklist](#) includes a section on ergonomics.
- Augment your workspace with tools that make you love it, the more you enjoy your setup, the less likely you'll work from a bed which can [negatively impact the quality of your sleep](#). Suggestions include an extra monitor, a fancy keyboard, and high quality headphones for calls.

Create a routine

- As your home becomes your workspace, it's important to create a sense of routine to create distinction between your working time and personal time, you shouldn't feel or be expected to be "on" all day. Create time for breaks and establish a time when your work day ends (or abide by your company's working hours).
- Consider what elements go into you feeling personally satiated and energized to begin your workday. Does it look like taking a bike ride and having breakfast? Reading the news and having a cup of coffee? Taking your dog for a walk? Do a personal intake of what feels good to you, having these touchstones will provide much needed personal time before jumping into your work day.
- Don't forget to eat! Pick a time for lunch and/or dinner, this might look like the same time everyday or choosing a time at the beginning of your workday. Use this time to get away from your computer if you can, if not, [here's some suggestions for creating a dynamic desk lunch](#)
- If struggling with focus, take a break and do something that will energize you, that can be closing your eyes for 15 minutes, having a private dance party, you name it.
- Be diligent about your calendar, often when initially working from home the lack of boundaries around time can make it difficult to stay timely.

Productivity tools

- Pomodoro

Tips Working in a crisis or under stress

- [Low-Challenge, High-Skill Tasks in Terrible Times](#)
- [Wellness, while working apart](#) - Kelsey Merkley (née Wiens), Ontario Digital Service

Security

TBA

- <https://jemurai.com/blog/>
- Learning about Threat Modeling and practice it for specific engagements and activities.
- Make a plan and put it into practice for managing online harassment
 - Guides to managing harassment online:
 - <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>
- [Tips on Cyber Safety](#) - Kelly Garant, Ontario Digital Service
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Working Remote after Covid19

TBA

- [Reinventing Work in the Age of COVID-19](#) - Crowdsourced ideas on the future of work

Additional Resources

One-on-One Coaching

- Free [1:1 assistance transitioning a team to working remotely](#) by Jeremy Zilar, Director of Digital Gov, U.S. General Services Administration
- Free [1:1 Remote and telework coaching for government agencies](#) by Vyki Englert, Principal Compiler LA

Recorded Talks, Webinars, Podcasts

- [Successful Remote and Distributed Work in Uncertain Times](#), Code for America 03/12/2020
- [WEBINAR—COVID-19: Remote work and workplace preparedness](#), JLL watch on demand
- [Panel Discussion: Leading teams through times of uncertainty and upheaval](#) 04/17/2020
- Scaling Software Teams [Podcast: Becoming A Resilient Manager with Laura Hogan](#) 04/21/2020

Laws

- Federal [Telework Enhancement Act](#) of 2010
- California
 - South Coast Air Quality Management District's (SCAQMD) [Rule 2202 On-Road Motor Vehicle Mitigation Options](#) requires the implementation of strategies to reduce emissions from employee commuting by employers with more than 250 employees. Teleworking is one approved program component.

Miscellaneous Resources

- [Coronavirus Tech Handbook](#) - crowdsourced tools and tips for everything from treating the disease to hosting events online. [Section on working remote](#)
- [5 Tools Local Governments Can Use To Help Staff Work From Home During The Coronavirus Crisis](#) from govtech startup CityGrows
- [O'Reilly Online Learning](#) - "O'Reilly is in a unique position to help agencies, cities, and government workers around the world trying to overcome an array of technical hurdles to better help their constituencies. So we're granting government agencies in the US and abroad free access to O'Reilly online learning now through July 6."

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Ontario Digital Service team, and their fantastic [working remote blog series](#).