

Asking Accordant

Returning to the Office Environment



While it makes sense for some organizations to continue a work-from-home staffing model, more and more organizations are encouraging and even requiring team members to return to the office, if only for a day or two a week. While some in-person practices are still warranted, many lessons have been learned about what should be reconsidered or eliminated. Learn more about return-to-office strategies from the Accordant team of experts.



As team members continue to return to the office environment, what pre-pandemic office activities do you feel should return, which are no longer appropriate and what new activities should begin?

ANSWERS:



[Andrew Watt, FCIOF](#) | Accordant Senior Principal

I think we have all missed the way in which thinking develops through casual conversation, as well as the sense of “team” that comes from being in the same physical space. I do believe that meetings can remain primarily virtual as they offer a more structured, disciplined, efficient and productive platform. I also believe that in-person creative sessions need to be included and held in informal settings to promote positive brainstorming energy within the physical meeting space and attendees.



[Heather Wiley Starankovic, CAP®, CFRE](#) | Accordant Principal Consultant

Make sure you are focused on culture, how it has changed over the past few years and how it can be enhanced. Make space for folks who are more social and need personal interaction and meetings. Also honor those who are incredibly productive and happy in a virtual environment. Don't assume a one-size-fits-all model with your evolving office culture. It may be more work in the beginning to ensure you have the right ingredients for a great culture that includes team

members feeling supported and performing well. It is, however, well worth the initial efforts as it is ever harder and more expensive to replace high performers who may leave should you prescribe a uniform strategy to office activities and overall culture.



[Michelle Rovang](#) | Accordant Principal Consultant

Aside from the true loss of lives, the nature of relationships and community bonds were some of the greatest casualties during the pandemic. Relationships and creating a renewed sense of trust is pivotal moving forward, especially while the economy provides uncertainty. Potential donors are seeking strong and bold leadership. Special events are being used more sparingly and deliberately. Social media and more granular data analysis provide a discerning lens to develop tangible goals that are sustainable and measurable. While there is a clear need and desire for campaigns, strong leaders should advocate for innovative initiatives that incorporate [wave campaigns](#). These strategies provide shorter horizons with specific metrics; therefore, philanthropy executives must identify vital partnerships and key projects to engage donors with quantifiable solutions and outcomes.



[Jessica Carswell, CFRE](#) | Accordant Senior Consultant

Bring back the hallway meetings and lunchroom brainstorms! New ideas and important decisions do not get made exclusively in formal meetings, especially within the structure of an online meeting. Sending and answering emails after dinner or apologizing for not immediately responding to an email, text or chat message is no longer appropriate. The pandemic provided an opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones and we need to honor each other's calendars and time around work hours. We should also keep PTO and vacation sacred. Allow colleagues to truly take time off without being contacted or coming back to a plethora of missed emails.



[Molly Davidson](#) | Accordant Senior Consultant for Communications

Make sure all meetings have a clear and focused agenda and purpose. It's not efficient to have simple round-robin reporting on activities. Virtual meetings definitely have their place, but onsite meetings provide time for many to catch up in person, so allow several minutes for that purpose. Onsite meetings also come with in-person synergy that helps ensure important and sometimes tough conversations occur to achieve consensus on goals and solutions. When you use in-person gatherings to harness the collective energy and brainpower in the room, you'll find more creative solutions and greater buy-in from your team members, so do keep onsite meetings in your strategies.



[Susan McSherry-Attwell](#) | Accordant Senior Consultant

Before COVID-19, community and connection were often found through informal gatherings among the staff in a conference room. It was likely a "stand up" meeting to remain brief and informal, sharing birthdays, wins, challenges, foundation news and even inspirational moments. This was a great way to create a sense of togetherness and belonging and should be included in plans moving forward. However, quick adaptation to virtual meetings resulted in tighter and

more succinct agendas, which should continue whether meeting virtually or back in person. Hosting team member feedback sessions provides opportunities to explore what went well during remote work, what should remain intact and what practices can be developed for an optimal work environment, both in the office and virtually. Leaders must remain flexible and keep an open mind while leading teams through the transition of returning back to the office, remaining remote or implementing some form of hybrid work.



What health care philanthropy, leadership and community health advancement questions do you have for Accordant? Please email us [HERE](#).