



RETURN TO OFFICE

# Best Practices Playbook for a Flexible Hybrid Approach

CHALLENGE SEATTLE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SEATTLE METRO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
AND DOWNTOWN SEATTLE ASSOCIATION

May 2023



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## OVERALL GOAL



## Ensuring Much-Needed Flexibility for Employees in a Hybrid Mode

**R**ight now, we're at a key moment for downtown Seattle: the city is facing record high commercial vacancy rates, loss of foot traffic, and a catastrophic financial cliff if businesses don't return to downtown Seattle.

Our leaders in elected office are putting together robust plans on public safety, transit, and downtown revitalization. The public sector is also committed to bringing their employees back to the office. As the business community is demanding solutions on these issues, we have a responsibility to do our part.

Hybrid work is here for the foreseeable future, and while every company has a unique culture, business model, and workforce, more than 90% of downtown Seattle employers are back full time in office or embracing a structured hybrid approach.

We can come together to ensure much needed flexibility for employees in a hybrid model and advance four goals:

- Provide social benefits to employees and employers
- Address inequities in our community and workplaces
- Revitalize downtown Seattle
- Mitigate the impact of government revenue loss

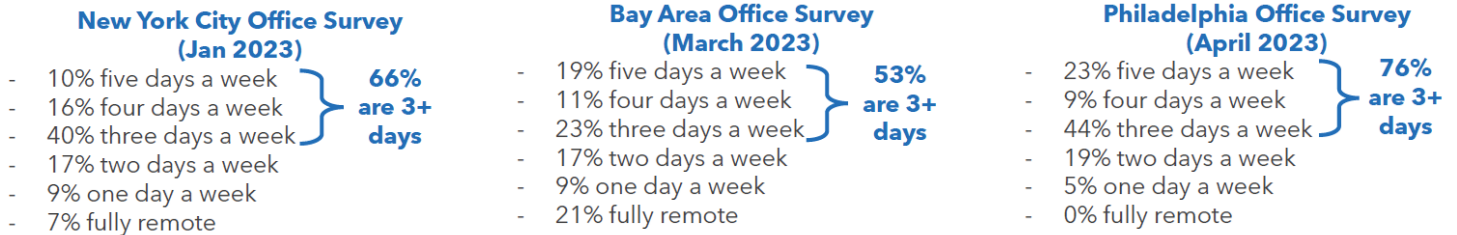


## THE CURRENT STATE OF RTO

# More Companies Moving from Remote to Hybrid

### ACROSS THE COUNTRY

In 2022 and 2023, more companies are shifting to additional days in the office, including in tech and financial hubs such as New York City and the Bay Area with **9 in 10 companies nationwide expected to require employees to come to the office with some frequency**. In addition to local employers, major companies across the country—Apple, General Motors, UPS, KPMG, Uber and Bank of America—have increased their in office days to at least three days a week.



### IN THE PUGET SOUND REGION

Over the last three years, there has been different shifts of remote, hybrid and in-office expectations.

The five days a week of 9 a.m.-5 p.m. in-office days are not returning for the foreseeable future; however, employers are moving toward a formal hybrid approach and increasing in-office days.

Several of Seattle's prominent employers, including Amazon, Apple, Expedia, Redfin, Nordstrom, Google, DocuSign, Weyerhaeuser, and a number of major professional and financial services firms, have already paved the way by implementing a structured hybrid model.

Public sector employees in Seattle are also returning to the office. The City of Seattle and the Attorney General's Office have returned to at least 2 days a week in office.

“DocuSign joins growing list of tech companies summoning employees back to the office”  
*GeekWire, 5-2-23*

“Weyerhaeuser employees told to return to HQ in Seattle”  
*Puget Sound Business Journal, 5-8-23*

“South Lake Union businesses welcome Amazon workers’ return to office”  
*KUOW, 5-2-23*

“Redfin will require employees back in office two days a week”  
*Puget Sound Business Journal, 4-25-23*



## THE CURRENT STATE OF RTO

### What is the typical workweek in downtown Seattle?

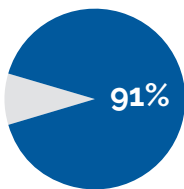
23% five days a week

8% four days a week

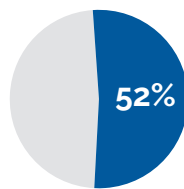
31% three days a week

62% are in the office three or more days

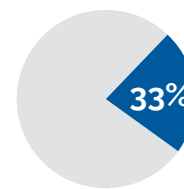
**IN APRIL 2023, THE SEATTLE METRO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF 220+ BUSINESSES IN THE PUGET SOUND. KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:**



91% of companies in downtown Seattle have a hybrid or fully in-person model



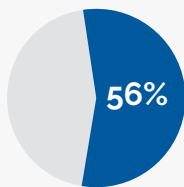
52% of businesses have seen in-office traffic exceed required days in office



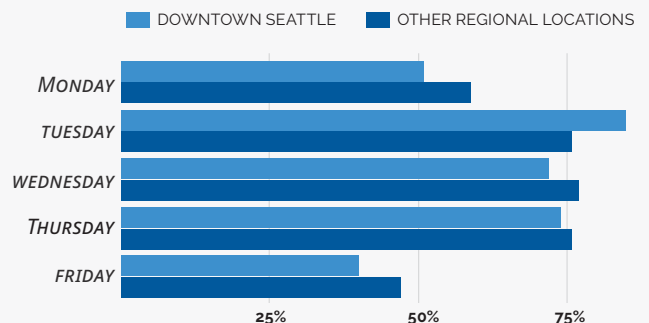
33% of companies in downtown Seattle offer incentives

#### REQUIRED IN-OFFICE / IN-PERSON FINDINGS

56% of downtown businesses have implemented a requirement for in-person days

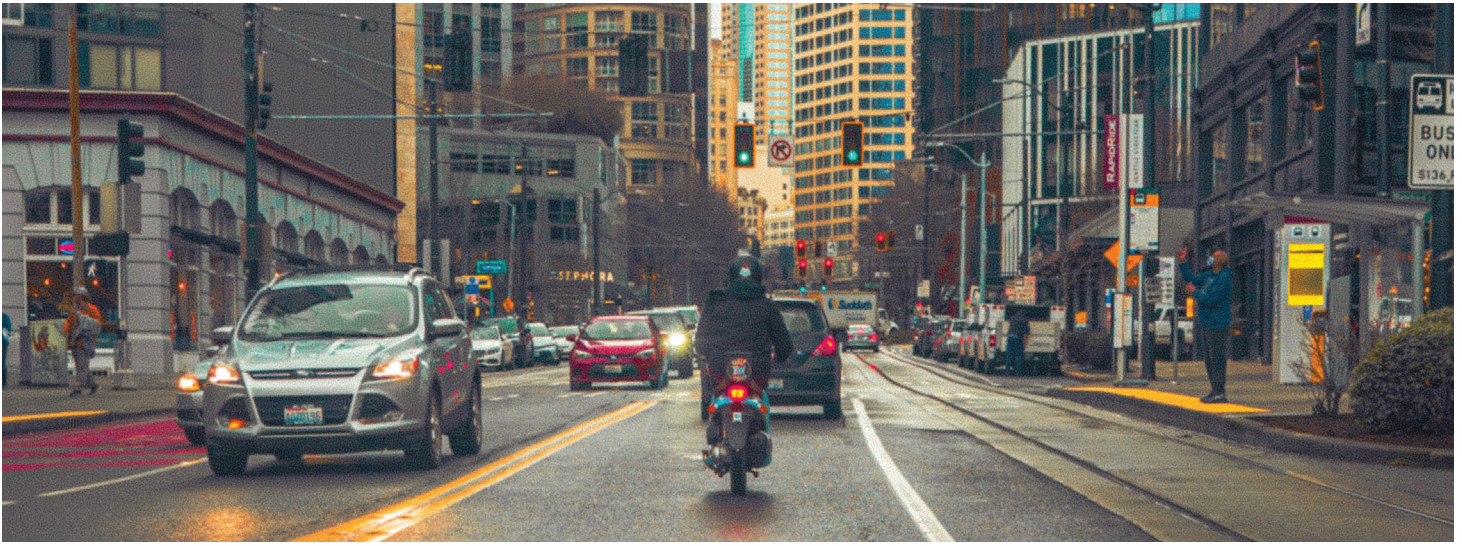


Days employees are required to be in-office, Downtown Seattle vs. other regional locations:





## THE CURRENT STATE OF RTO



### WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR DOWNTOWN SEATTLE?

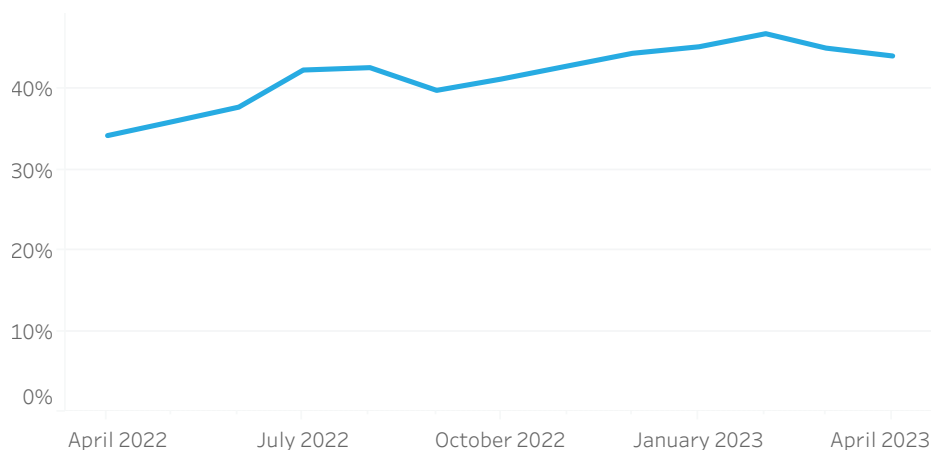
**D**owntown accounts for approximately half of Seattle’s economic activity—including 55% of total jobs, more than 80% of office space, nearly 90% of all hotel rooms, two-thirds of apartment units and nearly 60% of property taxes.

More than 340,000 jobs are based in downtown, which is why returning back to the office will significantly increase foot traffic and support our small businesses.

With increasing commercial vacancies and the end of the construction boom, adopting a hybrid model with three days in the office can mitigate at least \$2 billion of revenue loses for Seattle and the Eastside.

**Visitors and office workers drive downtown foot traffic. While tourism has nearly rebounded, office worker foot traffic is only at 44% of 2019 levels.**

*RETURN TO OFFICE: MONTHLY WORKER FOOT TRAFFIC COMPARED TO 2019*





BEST PRACTICES

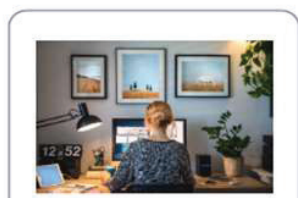
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# Deciding, Implementing and Communicating a Hybrid Approach

Seattle's businesses are embracing a modern work model that balances the best of remote and in-person work through a "structured hybrid" approach.

LESS TIME IN OFFICE

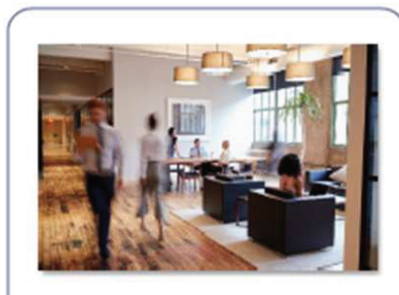
MORE TIME IN OFFICE



Fully-Flexible



No in office requirement (e.g. employee choice or fully remote models)



Structured Hybrid



Structured hybrid, which averages 2-4 days a week, is a **flexible work strategy** that promotes balance **professionally and personally**.

It is a model designed to ensure that a significant percentage of work occurs in-person and synchronously, while also empowering employees to define their work-life boundaries and commute times.

The structured hybrid model aims to foster a culture of trust and community, which can lead to lower attrition rates and increased job satisfaction.



Full Time In Office



5 days a week in person



## BEST PRACTICES

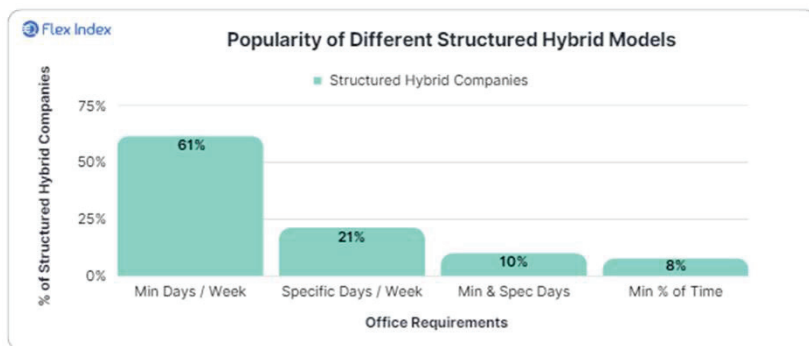
### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach

#### DECIDING THE BEST HYBRID APPROACH

Every company has a unique culture, business model, and workforce with a current return to office model, and leaders must create an approach balancing these interests. Return to office approaches will vary across industries and businesses. Bring together a return to office team to define: company values, shared benefits to the organization and employees, and specific approaches to return to office.

Companies can implement a variety of “freedom within a framework” hybrid approaches including targets or requirements to reach an average of three days in office per week:

- **Minimum days:** Companies are setting a minimum number of days employees must work from the office each week. Many local employers are also setting a higher number of days for managers/supervisors or leadership.
- **Specific days:** Companies are setting specific days per week (e.g. Tuesday and Wednesday).
- **Minimum and specific days:** Companies are setting minimum days and some specific days.
- **Minimum percentage of time:** Some companies are setting a percentage of time to work from the office.
- **Specific weeks per quarter:** Some companies in the region are bringing together employees for specific weeks. This could also be a model for specific teams such as finance teams too.



#### WHERE TO GET STARTED



##### UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE WORKFORCE

- Evaluate current data of workforce in person and deskless or frontline workers
- Understand employee concerns through engage in surveys and listening sessions
- Engage labor unions and employee groups



##### BUILD PLANS

- Identify hybrid approach and in person recommendations or requirements
- Prepare facilities with new amenities and/or redesign
- Identify any new benefits or incentives
- Address policy on remote employees not located in Puget Sound
- Create approval structure for exemptions to policy such as employees who live more than 20-30 miles from the office



##### COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS FROM LEADERSHIP

- Articulate the “why”
- Emphasize continued flexibility
- Communicate from the CEO
- Create overall timeline



##### GUIDANCE TO MANAGERS

- Empower managers to meet with teams and employees to develop in office team plans
- Create detailed FAQs for managers and employees



##### FREQUENTLY AND TRANSPARENTLY COMMUNICATE

- Create a cadence of frequent internal communications
- Be transparent about unknowns





## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach



#### EMPOWERING MANAGERS TO USE IN-OFFICE DAYS EFFECTIVELY

Employees should feel that in person days are **intentional, purposeful and focused** on collaboration and connection.

**Managers and supervisors must be empowered to work with their teams to align in office work schedules and provided support, training and guidance to execute the new norms. Specific in office work should be encouraged such as:**

##### Team Collaboration

- ✓ Team and/or department meetings including cross functional team meetings
- ✓ Strategic planning
- ✓ 1:1 meetings with management/supervisors
- ✓ Staff meetings or retreats
- ✓ Client or customer meetings
- ✓ Serendipitous conversations with colleagues (e.g. "Nothing unintended happens virtually")

##### Project Collaboration

- ✓ Kicking off a project
- ✓ Brainstorming
- ✓ Complex stages of a project
- ✓ Presentation

##### Professional Development

- ✓ In person opportunities with executive and senior leadership
- ✓ Mentorship
- ✓ Professional development opportunities
- ✓ Networking across organization

##### Human Resources or IT

- ✓ Onboarding
- ✓ Small group tours or re-onboarding for those hired in the pandemic
- ✓ Trainings
- ✓ Performance evaluations
- ✓ IT

##### Social Activities

- ✓ Informal team time (lunches or happy hours)
- ✓ Celebrations
- ✓ Volunteer opportunities



## **i** Case Study: Microsoft Teams Agreements

Managers are a critical bridge between evolving employee expectations and leadership priorities. If empowered, they hold the key to unlock the potential of hybrid work.

Equip them with the resources and training they need to manage the transition. While policy is set at the top, leaders need to decentralize decision-making and empower managers to make change on behalf of their employees' individual needs.

Microsoft encourages managers to use this template to create team agreements for hybrid work.

**Manager Quick Guide: Developing team agreements**

**Why this matters:** There are as many ways of working as there are employees. As an organization, we value and support flexibility as part of our hybrid workplace where every employee can do their best by working the way they prefer. Flexibility may differ with each role, work site, work hour, and work location. Team agreements can bridge these differences, helping teams communicate and collaborate by discussing and agreeing to certain principles and guidelines that reflect the diversity of workstyles on the team. All workplace options for individuals should depend on the alignment with team agreements, in addition to alignment with our organization's other hybrid work guidance. See your organization's guidance on hybrid work for details.

**Your role:** As a manager, you have the opportunity to lead your team in establishing team agreements that clearly outline how the team will work together and support diverse workstyles.

**Establishing team agreements**

To create these agreements, you will need to facilitate an ongoing conversation with your team that considers business needs, individual needs, and the needs of the team broadly. See your organization's guidance on facilitating conversations for guidance. You'll need to ensure your team agreements enable everyone on your team to be effective. It is important that you model, coach, and care, challenging assumptions and offering your team the most flexibility possible. See your organization's guidance on flexible working to ensure agreements are in alignment with our organization's policies.

We recommend you complete these seven steps for establishing team agreements in a hybrid workplace.

- 1** Set the context with your team  
Establishing team agreements is best done by collaborating with everyone on the team. To set context, start with team conversations that spark discussions for decision making and health and safety. See your organization's guidance on team conversations for sample conversations, which are built to get your team thinking and set the stage for the future team workshops specifically around the team agreements. See your organization's guidance on workshops for workshop guidance.
- 2** Consider how to enhance your skills for leading a hybrid workplace  
Leading in a flexible work environment is a skill that benefits from ongoing investment in learning and development. See your organization's guidance to managers on hybrid work to learn more about how to help all employees navigate and adapt to our hybrid workplace.
- 3** Consider your team's core priorities and existing dynamics  
All employees have a worksite, work hours, and work location. A hybrid workplace assumes a mix of workstyles across all three dimensions for our employees and our organizations. We are all accountable for taking the time to consider the workplace that is currently best for us to fulfill our responsibilities while also ensuring the health and safety of those around us. Take the time to zoom out and consider the working patterns across the team. For example:
  - What are the objectives of your team's work or current projects?
  - What is the nature of their work (e.g., collaborative or individual)?
  - How long has the team been working together?
  - Have they already been working in a hybrid environment?
  - Which working styles would allow the team to deliver high performance and maximize flexibility?
  - Are there occasions when it might be important for the team to be together in the same location (e.g., new projects, projects with high task interdependence, brainstorming or creative work, communicating essential informal knowledge, etc.)?

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**Manager Quick Guide: Developing team agreements (continued)**

- 4** Set up 1:1 conversations to support employees  
As a manager, helping your team deliver their best work through a hybrid approach geared towards their needs is an important part of your role. There are many factors that they will need to consider in their decision-making process, such as the health and safety of those around them, personal circumstances, productivity, and their ability to complete their work. See your organization's guidance on 1:1 conversations and additional employee guidance for more information.
- 5** Create and align on team agreements  
To create alignment, facilitate a conversation with your team to develop your own team principles and team guidelines. See your organization's guidance on developing team agreements for guidance. Now that you have created the context for the team, consider the ways of working that will enable them to be at their best. Talk to the team about what agreements they want to make to have clarity around how they might best work together. Examples include:
  - **Availability** – are there certain hours of the day that the team needs to be available, either in person or virtually (e.g., establishing core hours across the team, agreeing to response times for emails, questions, etc.)?
  - **Attendance** – which key events do team members need to attend, either in person or virtually (e.g., daily stand-up meetings, weekly team meetings, etc.)?
  - **In-person expectations** – be clear on the occasions where the team is expected to be together in person to achieve business results (e.g., quarterly team offsite, project kick off, etc.)
  - **Team habits** – what are the daily practices that the team wants to adopt to ensure effective work in a hybrid environment (e.g., 55-minute meetings to ensure natural breaks are built into the day, sharing and respecting communication preferences (emails, calls, chat), etc.)?

In addition to the team workshop, see your organization's guidance on effective team meetings for additional guidance.

- 6** Capture and share team agreements  
Document what was discussed and decided upon during your team agreements workshop. Alignment and ownership of team agreements is important, so invite feedback or further suggestions in case something was not captured during the workshop itself. Review them against organizational guidance and share with your manager to ensure alignment. Once feedback is incorporated, share widely with your peers, team members, and stakeholders.
- 7** Follow up regularly  
Align with the team on how, when, and how often you will check in on how the team agreements are working. Agree on a process for requesting any changes to ensure the agreements remain flexible and responsive and that the team stays aligned.

**Resources**

- For more information about our organization's COVID-19 policies and procedures, see your organization's guidance.
- For more information about our organization's flexible hybrid work options, see your organization's guidance.
- For general guidance, tips, and resources for working from home during COVID-19, see your organization's guidance.
- Send your team agreements to us! Email them to [email address] and we will anonymize before sharing more broadly.





## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach

#### COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

**L**ocal employers have focused on a combination of key messages to their employees:

##### ***In person collaboration***

Face-to-face collaboration is one of the greatest benefits of working in the office. While many workers are able to be more productive at home, remote work has caused the share of collaboration time employees spent with cross-group connections to drop by about 25% of the pre-pandemic level. Face-to-face communication enhances team dynamics, problem-solving capabilities, and productivity.

##### ***Social and personal connections***

After the last three years of remote work, employees have not had the opportunity for daily social interactions with their colleagues. These social connections help colleagues build trust, support one another, and solve problems while preventing silos and conflict. Overall, employees who have meaningful relationships and feel socially connected at work will have higher levels of job satisfaction.

##### ***Team performance***

One of the key aspects of returning to the office is the collaborative work between teams on projects. In addition to face time with supervisors, 64% of respondents were more likely to come into the office if they knew their team would be there.

##### ***Frontline/deskless employees***

For many companies, a significant portion of their workforce has been in person throughout the pandemic while portions of the company have worked remotely. Efforts to create more parity can minimize tension and foster cohesive culture.

##### ***Increased connection to the company and mission***

Culture remains imperative for employees to succeed —76% of employees say culture is very or extremely important for them to be effective at their job, yet only 25% of remote or hybrid knowledge workers feel connected to their company's culture. For a culture to truly succeed, employees must be aligned and connected to it.

##### ***Learning, professional growth, and mentorship***

One of the strongest benefits of working in the office is collaboration, connecting, and building relationships with senior leaders. In person workers spend more time a week getting mentored, networking, and receive more feedback on their work.

**O**ther key messages could resonate with other local employers or people managers including:

##### ***Work personal/life boundaries***

The pandemic blurred many work-life boundaries. Meetings, chat, workday span, and after-hours and weekend work have all risen over the past two years. By returning to the physical office, many employees are establishing a clear delineation between work and home life, thereby minimizing stress and fostering a healthier work environment.

##### ***Stronger organizational culture***

Regular in-person interactions foster camaraderie and shared purpose. Building a strong organizational culture becomes feasible when employees have opportunities to connect, bond, and align their values through in-person experiences.

##### ***Equity***

Remote work reinforces pre-existing inequalities since it is only available to highly skilled, highly educated workers in a handful of industries, occupations, and geographies. Many individuals are in occupations that cannot be done remotely, including 55 million American workers employed in "essential" or "critical" industries of health care, agriculture, and services.

##### ***Greater innovation and creativity***

Innovation is fueled by the spontaneous exchange of ideas during in-person collaboration. This creative cross-pollination leads to novel problem-solving approaches and pioneering solutions, essential for staying competitive and driving organizational growth. At least two recent studies found that virtual interactions can hinder creative idea generation whereas idea selection isn't necessarily hindered by virtual interactions.

##### ***Building authentic relationships and friendships***

In-person interactions under the hybrid model cultivate authentic, trusting relationships that bolster mental health, create the development of work friendships, and pave the way for future career opportunities.



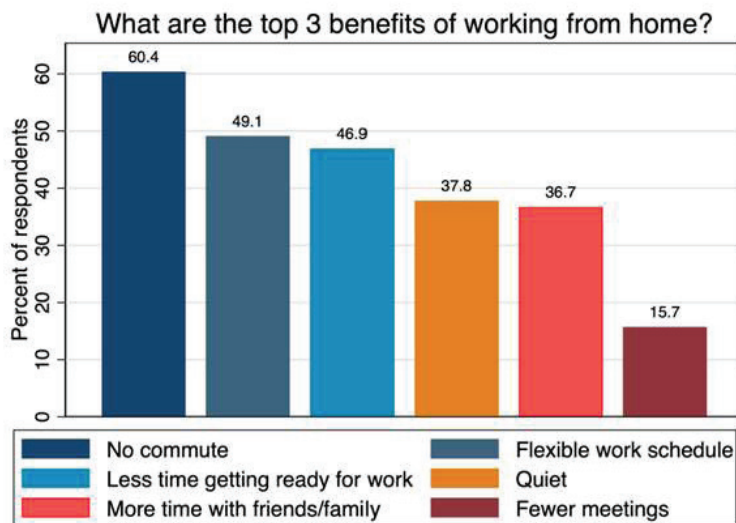
## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach

#### ADDRESSING CONCERNS AND FAQs

The pandemic revealed significant benefits to working from home, and during this time, some employees have relocated. The top benefits of working from home include less time commuting, the ability to balance work and personal life, and the ability to get work done and meet deadlines. Employers should acknowledge valid concerns from employees including:

- **Removing flexible work schedule**
- **Long commute times:** Americans are saving about 70 minutes a day commuting and getting ready. 30 minutes of that time is spent working more. Some employers are decreasing the requirement for employees who live more than 20-30 miles from their office.
- **Deep work or quiet work:** Recent studies on hybrid work have shown that employees can be more productive in a quiet setting a home (writing, preparing presentations, reading, or one-on-ones).
- **Public safety:** In downtown, some employees have concerns about the safety of transit or crime in downtown.



Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA)

**E**mployers should compile a detailed FAQ addressing key issues such as:

- Can employees choose their days in the office?
- If I live more than 20 miles away, can I work remotely full time?
- Do I need to relocate to the Puget Sound?
- What qualifies as in person work?
- Are there exceptions to returning to the office three days a week? If I'm unable or unwilling to return to the office, how do I request an exception to work remotely?
- I have an exception from my leadership to work remotely (either from before or during the pandemic), can I still work remotely as most employees return to the office?
- Is there flexibility to core business hours?
- Is the hybrid schedule permanent or subject to change?
- What if I am immuno-compromised and still worried about COVID?

In addition, the City of Seattle and King County have put together a Q&A on updates on public safety, homelessness, and transit.





## **i** Case Study: REDFIN

In April 2023, the CEO of Redfin announced to all employees their new hybrid policy which requires at least 2 days in the office in July 2023. His note hit on many of the key effective messages. A few excerpts:

### People Connect Better Face to Face

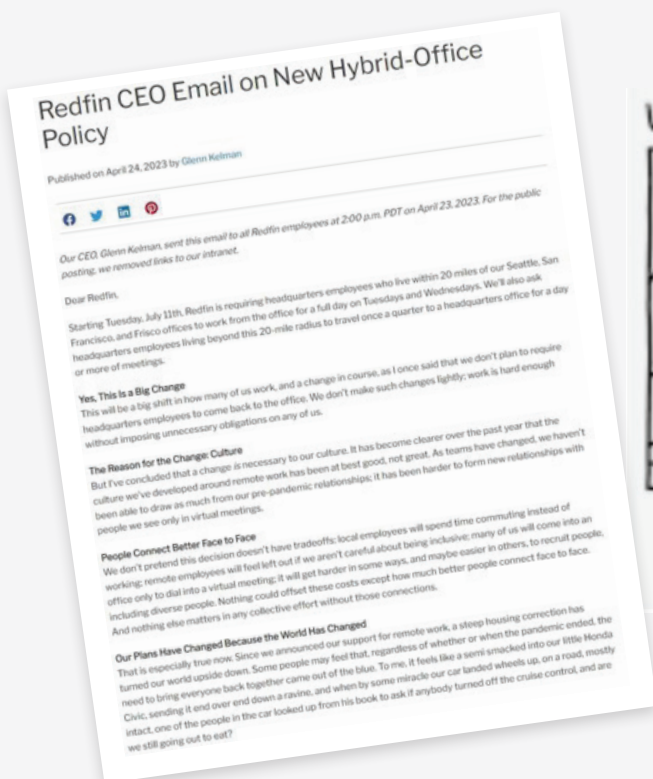
“We don’t pretend this decision doesn’t have tradeoffs: local employees will spend time commuting instead of working; remote employees will feel left out if we aren’t careful about being inclusive; many of us will come into an office only to dial into a virtual meeting; it will get harder in some ways, and maybe easier in others, to recruit people, including diverse people. Nothing could offset these costs except how much better people connect face to face. And nothing else matters in any collective effort without those connections.”

### If Something Crazy Comes Up, You’ll Have the Latitude to Deal With It

“For two weeks a year starting this July, headquarters employees can work from other locations the entire week, but one of those weeks has to be after September. Deliveries requiring a signature and other events requiring you to be at home should generally be scheduled for Monday, Thursday or Friday, but if something unexpected comes up Tuesday or Wednesday, just let your manager know, and stay home to deal with it. Commuter subsidies will be available to anyone coming to the office, and can be used to pay for bus passes or parking spots.”

### The Kid Test

“At an all-remote office, employees are far less likely to connect with a mentor, let alone any new friends. Every day is mostly painless, but less satisfying. I still work from home on days when I need to crank stuff out, but that isn’t the only kind of work each of us does, even the loneliest engineer or designer. We have obligations to one another, on our own teams and beyond.”





## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach

#### CONTINUE EMPHASIZING PRE-PANDEMIC FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is a core enabler and benefit. People's expectations of the tradeoffs between home and work have changed, and hybrid work has allowed many to better balance the competing demands of work and personal lives. Key pre-pandemic flexibility existed in workplaces including:

- **Distant remote jobs:** Because of the nature of the work, some positions at companies may have been or continue to be remote jobs.
- **Remote opportunities:** Before the pandemic, many companies implemented policies to allow opportunity to work up to a certain number of days/weeks from a location other than their primary work location each year.
- **Dependent care and medical appointments:** One of the biggest barriers for many employees are their demands as parents and caregivers. Employers and people managers can encourage employees to report some of the time to the office—such as half days—and commute in off peak hours to manage key responsibilities like school, childcare, dependent care, or medical appointments.
- **Summer Fridays:** Many companies in Seattle have utilized Summer Fridays. Summer Fridays can be implemented in tandem with in person expectations throughout the week or half days in person on Friday.
- **Conferences, Off-site Meetings, and Travel:** Employees have flexible work schedules while traveling and attending off-site meetings and conferences.
- **Attendance Policies for Sick Employees:** If recovering from an illness, encouraging sick employees to stay home and choose remote work after sick days.

#### SENIOR EXECUTIVES LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Culture is driven by the CEOs and senior leadership teams. It is critical to have their involvement in return to office decisions and practices. Key opportunities to have senior executives engage include:

- **Model Personal Working Practices:** Some companies are having executives, senior management, and supervisors in person at least 4-5 days a week to ensure appropriate overlap with direct reports even if employees are in office 2-3 days a week.
- **Weekly Team Meetings:** Many CEOs are hosting their weekly leadership meetings in person.
- **Mentorship/Professional Development:** With the lack of mentors and in person connections in the last few years, professional development opportunities with senior executives are a motivating factor for many employees. Especially for early career Gen Z workers who began their career or have spent many years of their career in the pandemic.
- **Staff Retreats/Meetings/All Hands:** Across employee meetings, this is a key opportunity to connect with employees in person.
- **Leadership Lunch/Coffee Series:** Some local employers have started weekly or monthly series to have small convenings with employees across companies.
- **Attendance Policies for Sick Employees:** If recovering from an illness, encouraging sick employees to stay home and choose remote work after sick days.



## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Deciding, Implementing, and communicating a Hybrid Approach

#### STAFF MEETINGS AND RETREATS

With the rise of hybrid work and employees based across the country, Puget Sound employers are increasing the number of department and team retreats or in person all staff meetings. These are an effective practice to bring teams back together in person while supporting local businesses.

Best practices include:

- Creating flexibility for teams or departments to host all day or multi-day retreats
- Establishing a schedule (monthly or quarterly) with sufficient advanced notice
- Consistently bringing together out of area remote employees 2-4 times a year
- Identifying teams and departments that may need to meet more frequently (management, product, engineering or marketing)
- Conducting employee surveys which will likely show increased satisfaction
- Utilizing newly redesign office space for collaboration or local conference spaces

### Sample Schedule for Retreats

#### TUESDAY

- Arrival
- Catered lunch from local restaurant
- Department retreat with keynote, speakers, and Q&A
- Team happy hour/dinner at local restaurants
- Overnight at local downtown hotel (if out of area)
- 

#### WEDNESDAY

- Breakout sessions and/or in person trainings
- Catered lunch from local restaurant
- Strategic planning
- Evening local shared experiences/team building (sporting events/concerts, karaoke, cooking classes, or other activities)
- Overnight at local downtown hotel (if out of area)

#### THURSDAY

- Individual team meetings
- Catered lunch from local restaurant
- Depart



# 2

## Making In-Person Work Better



### BENEFITS TO ADDRESSING COMMUTES

Long commutes are one of the top barriers to returning to the office. The recent 2022 Commute Seattle survey of 64,000 workers found that top considerations for workers coming into Seattle were the duration of their commute, flexibility/convenience, and cost. From this survey, we know that the workers are typically going to the office on Tuesdays-Thursdays.

#### CREATING MORE FLEXIBILITY IN COMMUTES:

- 90% of Challenge Seattle employers offer flexibility in arrival and departure times.
- Flexible scheduling allows employees to shift commute trips out of peak commuting hours (aka rush hour) to avoid congestion on roads or transit.
- Granting your employees some flexibility in their daily commute times can help them avoid rush-hour congestion, creating a less stressful start and end to their workday.

#### ADDITIONALLY, LOCAL EMPLOYERS ARE OFFERING COMMUTERS:

- Commuter stipends such as WageWorks Commuter Card or subsidized ORCA pass
- Free bikes or e-bike lease to own programs
- Employee shuttles
- Vanpool subsidies
- Stipends to incentivize transit, walking, biking or scooter share
- Parking benefits
- EV charging





## BEST PRACTICES

### 2. Making In-Person Work Better

#### MITIGATING BARRIERS TO RETURN TO OFFICE

While many employers offered robust health care, retirement, and benefit packages pre-pandemic, some local employers have embraced new robust benefits and incentives to mitigate barriers to return to the office and strengthen the workplace culture. In addition to addressing commutes, these include:

- Childcare (On site options, back up care for children or adults, and/or childcare stipends)
- Illness
- Pets (On site or stipends)
- Food and beverage (Snacks, catered lunches, or happy hours)
- On site events and programming
- Casual dress code



#### Case Study: Peach

*In addition to on-site catering from local businesses, some employers have implemented short term subsidies in the first few weeks or months back in person using Peach.*

*Peach provides free or subsidized lunch options to employees to allow teams or colleagues to visit small businesses near the office. This digital lunch card can only be used for lunches, with geographic range surrounding the office, and time restrictions (typically 11am to 2pm weekdays).*

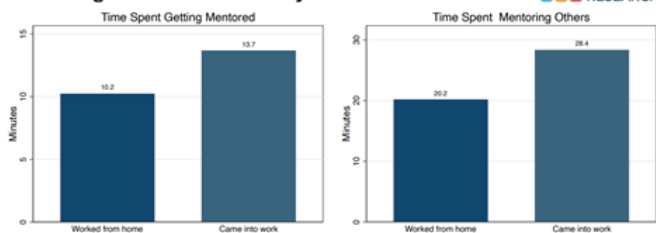
#### IN-PERSON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

An April 2023 survey found workers who go into the office spend 25% more time on career development than their remote counterpart.

- In-office workers also spend significantly more time per week—about 40 minutes—getting mentored or mentoring a colleague.
- In-office workers log about 15 more minutes per week carrying out professional development and learning activities.

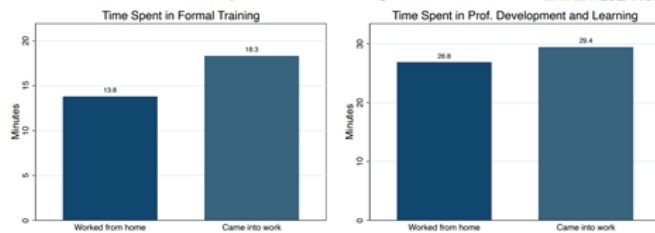
One key area that many local employers are engaging are leadership opportunities with senior executives. This includes small group settings such as coffees, lunches or volunteer opportunities

**Workers Spend More of Their Workday Mentoring Others Or Getting Mentored When They Come Into Work** WFH RESEARCH



Responses to the question: How many minutes of your working day did you spend on each of the following activities last Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday?

**Workers Spend More of Their Workday In Formal Training and Professional Development When They Came Into Work** WFH RESEARCH



Responses to the question: How many minutes of your working day did you spend on each of the following activities last Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday?

[Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes \(SWAA\)](#)



## BEST PRACTICES

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#### SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

The pandemic exacerbated and added to the mental health challenges in the workforce. Many employees have been isolated and disconnected with 55% of hybrid employees and 50% of remote employees that feel lonelier at work than before going hybrid or remote.

According to JLL Future of Work survey, 43% of employers are accelerating new or enhanced health and wellbeing investments for employees. While many employers previously offered a range of mental health benefits, **many employers locally have expanded benefits to include:**

- Gym memberships and on-site fitness centers
- Employee assistance programs
- Robust behavioral health and mental health coverage
- Virtual mental health or counseling services
- Additional PTO and/or mental health day
- Mental health or self-care apps such as Calm, Headspace, BetterUp, Talkspace, and
- Vida Health
- Volunteer days



Surgeon General's framework for workplace mental health and well-being (2022)





## BEST PRACTICES

### 2. Making In-Person Work Better

#### DESIGNING AND CREATING COLLABORATIVE SPACES

Companies are creating workplaces with spaces where employees can collaborate, focus, learn and socialize. These places should inspire and improve employee engagement. Some principles for redesigning workplaces for the future:

- Listen to the workforce's preferences to match the workplace with the right culture and amenities
- Ensure office spaces incorporate employee's health and wellbeing
- Create office environments that support people's workflows balancing social and collaborative spaces and access to more private work settings that minimize noise and distractions and help further the ability to work alone for deep concentration
- Design collaborative conference rooms with hybrid technology for meetings of all sizes
- Incorporate spaces for social interaction, coaching, and learning to foster personal growth and employee engagement as these areas can be informal, hospitality-infused spaces that provide a different vibe for a new mix of experiences that younger workers crave

#### A New Kind of Office Building

Key themes for the modern era of work (courtesy: IA Interior Architects)

Inside									Outside
<b>01</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Amenity &amp; Culture</b>	<b>Learning &amp; Mentorship</b>	<b>Diversity, Equity &amp; Inclusion</b>	<b>Hybrid Working</b>	<b>Cool Factor</b>	<b>Flexible Work</b>	<b>Health &amp; Wellness</b>	<b>Commuting Experience</b>	<b>Integration</b>	<b>Exterior &amp; Interior</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Amenity and culture-based</b> workplace with fewer desks and more <b>optional work points</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design that facilitates <b>in-person learning and mentorship</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated responses to <b>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environments supportive of the <b>new hybrid ways of working</b>, rich with technology that connects us to others globally while we rebuild culture with those who are in person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bring in the "cool factor"</b> with design, technology, art, and activity to create buzz, connection, and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Think "Instagram Worthy" moments!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flexible work, social and retail environments</b> that adjust with speed responding to continually changing needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing <b>healthy places</b> that also promote <b>whole health practices</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equitable arrival and departure experiences</b> that are memorable and intuitive for all modes of commuters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vibrant and changing retail with <b>Pop-up, Pop-ins and Pop-outs</b> integrated within office lobbies and amenity floors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Blurring the lines between exterior and interior</b> with both retail and building amenities inviting movement between the inside and outside.</li> </ul>





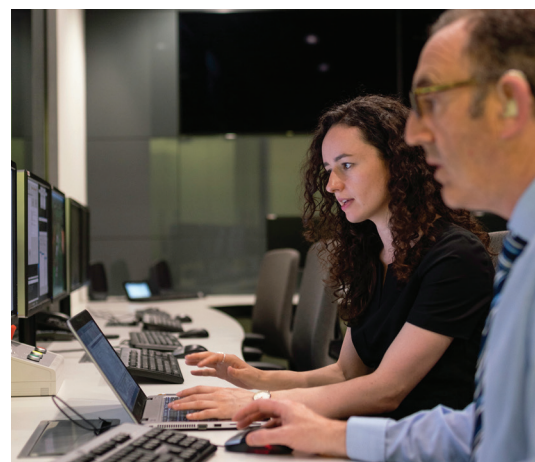
## BEST PRACTICES

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#### TRAINING AND TOOLS FOR HYBRID WORK

According to the JLL Future of Work survey, 69% have introduced or will introduce new technology to boost in person collaboration. This includes:

- Room scheduling
- Meeting scheduling such as Doodle
- Messaging such as Teams or Slack
- Hybrid meeting space technology such as Zoom or Teams
- Virtual collaboration tools
- Project management tools such as Asana or Trello



#### MEETING PRACTICES

The pandemic led to a rise of virtual meetings, and no one wants to go to the office to simply be in Zoom or Teams meetings all day. 3M introduced a guide to reduce meetings:

**Determine if meeting is the best collaboration method. Can the meeting be a chat, email or conversation? If the answer is “no” to many of these questions, write an email instead:**

- Does this meeting have a clear goal or an agenda?
- If it's a recurring meeting, has progress been made since the last meeting?
- Will it cover a complex issue? Does this topic require a back-and-forth dialogue?
- Do several people have to weight in to gain consensus?
- Is a response or resolution time sensitive?

#### Plan Intentionally.

- Be deliberate to invite essential participants
- Create and circulate an agenda including decisions or next steps

**Make your meeting effective and efficient. Shorter and punctual meetings can help ensure time is well spent.**

- Meetings can be accomplished in shorter periods of time with focus and purpose. Try to complete in 30-45 minutes instead of 60 or 90 minutes.
- Keep the meeting on track. Acknowledge when a conversation is going off topic.



#### Other Hybrid Meeting Considerations

- *Create company norms to begin meetings with built in breaks (:05, :25, :35, or :55) or build short breaks in days*
- *Limit meetings on particular days. A 2022 MIT Sloan Management study showed that when companies introduced one meeting-free day per week, productivity rose 35 percent.*
- *Establish consistent technology across conference rooms for hybrid meetings*
- *Articulate best practices (mics off, cameras on, utilizing chat, or raising hand)*



# 3

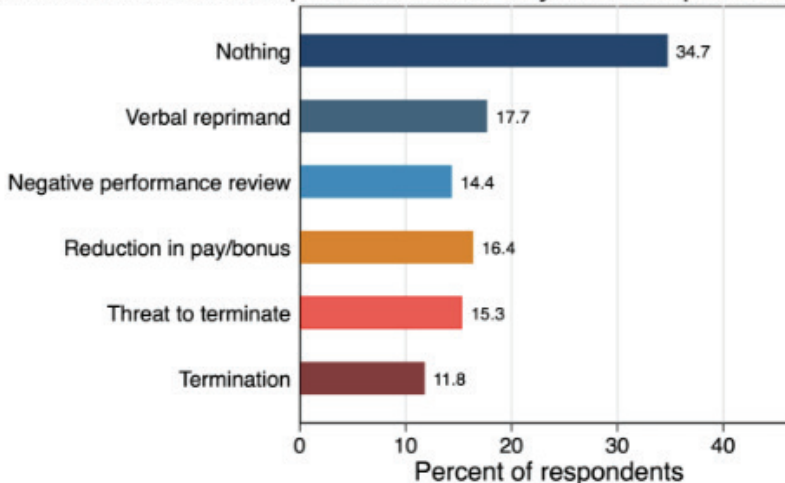
## Accountability and Feedback

### ACCOUNTABILITY APPROACHES

As most employees are complying with employer requests, there is limited research and best practices for employees who are refusing to return to the office.

Some local employers are addressing the issue as a performance issue through managers and supervisors.

How has your employer responded to employees who work on business premises fewer days than requested?



\*Note: Excludes respondents who say 'I don't know' or 'Other'.

[Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes \(SWAA\)](#)

### EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK AND REVISITING RTO PLANS

While there is some survey fatigue emerging across employers, local employers are engaging employees before, during, and after decisions through a variety of strategies including:

- All Hands or Employee Town Halls
- Q&A through meetings, intranet, and collaboration channels such as Slack
- Surveys
- ERG engagement
- Focus groups

Once a decision is made, employees and employers must commit to that decision. Many do not expect to change their new policies for the foreseeable future.



## CONCLUSION

### LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead, we envision a vibrant and thriving city. Our downtown—the convergence point for professional services, finance, government, research, philanthropy, life sciences, and cloud computing, technology, and sports—is poised for a promising future.

Return to office is a role that employers and employees need to play to contribute. The structured hybrid work model plays a pivotal role in this vision, and our talent base, fortified with diverse skills and perspectives, stands ready to take on the challenges of the future.

By marrying the benefits of both in-person and remote work, we are fostering an environment that promotes innovation, collaboration, and well-being. When done right, this balanced approach aligns perfectly with our vibrant, forward-thinking city, helping to re-establish downtown Seattle as a beacon of productivity and ingenuity.





# RTO: BEST PRACTICES PLAYBOOK FOR A FLEXIBLE HYBRID APPROACH

