

Before We Gather

Back to Work, Back to Basics

Your ministry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic may have ranged from a complete shutdown to an entirely new way of reaching your congregation. Ramping up in-person operations requires a careful plan, too, especially if you are rehiring furloughed or laid-off employees, recalling volunteers, or even hiring new workers.

What's clear is that returning to your former routine may not be possible. You may need to incorporate new practices into your employee and volunteer management in addition to your existing procedures.

Return to the Basics

Resist the temptation to speed up the process of recalling or hiring employees and volunteers in the interest of expediency or returning to full operations. Safe employee practices are just as important now as before the pandemic. Here's what to consider:

Plan now for continued infections. Even though your state's rate of infection and illness may be trending downward, illnesses related to COVID-19 still are possible and you need to be prepared. Factor in the chance for a re-emergence of hotspots or viral outbreaks. How will your ministry respond to a sick employee, child care worker, or volunteer? Consider how you will respond now and brush up on newly created sick leave laws. Do your employees qualify? What's your exposure for a lawsuit?

Resource: [Employment laws and how they relate to COVID-19.](#)

Hiring new workers. Because your state may have implemented stay-at-home orders, you may have found inventive new ways of reaching attendees. Things that worked and you'd like to continue doing may mean an increase in staff or volunteer positions. When filling new positions, don't skimp on the background checks. Comprehensive screening involves an application, in-person interview, a background check, and references check. Plus, what you need to know before hiring those out-of-school youths.

Resources: [Screening Guidelines for Churches and Camps](#). [Background Screening Checklist](#). [Hiring Youth](#).

Avoid liability: Keep good records. Accurate recordkeeping, especially payroll, is crucial. Have you kept separate records for furloughed or laid-off workers? Has your newly hired person completed required paperwork? Do you maintain daily records of cleaning schedules?

Resource: [Employment Practices Checklist](#), [Records Retention for Ministries](#)

Dealing with the backlog. Weddings, baptisms, memorial services, and more are a part of any church's daily schedule. But interruptions related to the pandemic likely caused many cancellations. Consider the enhanced workload when you return: answering phone calls, replying to emails, working with a jam-packed schedule. Do you need to create a temporary position to handle it all?

Resource: [Selecting and Screening Volunteers](#)

Expand volunteer coordinator position. When normal ministry operations resume, you may have an influx of people offering to volunteer or organizations looking for volunteer help. Does your current volunteer coordinator need more help?

Resource: [The Deacon's Bench: Volunteers](#)

Ask: did we hire an employee, volunteer, or independent contractor? Take the time to properly classify the person you just hired. Do you have an employee or a 1099 worker? Is an employee performing job duties “off the clock” simply to help out the ministry? Proper classification now helps avoid a lawsuit in the future.

Resources: [Use Caution When Classifying Workers](#), [Distinguishing Employees from Volunteers](#)

Watch for delayed mental health and addiction issues. The pandemic has created unique issues for workforces. Stress from pastors trying to do it all and often alone, families in isolation, financial concerns, loved ones falling ill, and grieving without a support system can exacerbate mental health and addiction issues. The fallout may not be felt for months. Support your pastoral staff and employees during this trying time. Ensure they know where to seek help to de-stress, recharge, discuss depression, and deal with addiction issues. Pastors may need time off to connect with other pastors.

Resources: [The Deacon’s Bench: Outreach](#), [The Deacon’s Bench: Workplace Trends](#), [Full Strength Network](#), [4 Steps to Starting a Mental Health Support Group](#)

Rethink office space. Maintaining social distancing guidelines helps slow the spread of the virus. Rethink your office space with an eye toward keeping workers safe. Do you need to spread out your workers or move a few to unused spaces? Conduct meetings virtually instead of in-person? You should follow your local and state’s guidelines when resuming operations, which may include wearing face coverings.

Resource: [Before We Gather: Facilities Preparation](#)