



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Human Resources
Department No.: 064
For Agenda Of: March 16, 2021
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: One hour

Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Maria Elena De Guevara, Human Resources Director
Director(s) 805-568-2816
Contact Info: Katie Torres, Benefits and Wellness Division Chief
805-698-1945

Maria Elena De Guevara

SUBJECT: Post-Pandemic County Workforce Strategies

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: General Services

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file the following reports:
 - a. Clean Commute Executive Report;
 - b. C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey Report; and,
 - c. Distributed Teams Hybrid Work Model;
- b) Approve Statement of Commitment to Workplace Flexibility;
- c) Refer budget request for \$110,000 for workforce training and engagement tools to County Executive Office for budget consideration; and
- d) Find that the proposed actions do not constitute a "Project" within the meaning of California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to 14 CCR 15378(b)(2), as it consists of general policy and procedure making.

Summary Text:

Prior to COVID-19, County Human Resources (CoHR) worked to examine the role of teleworking for the County's workforce. However, the urgent and then ongoing nature of the COVID crisis required a broader understanding of the sweeping implications of the pandemic to the work environment and, specifically, to the County employee experience. This departmental item provides the Board with various follow up

data points, lessons learned from the pandemic experience, and CoHR's recommended strategies for preparing the County workforce for a post-pandemic work environment.

Background:

In the fall of 2019, CoHR presented to the Board an assessment of employee benefits that could positively impact roadway congestion and the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) through incentives to the County workforce. At that time, the County had 95 employees working remotely; hence, a survey and a focused pilot program regarding teleworking commenced under the title Clean Commute Program (CCP).

The 6-month pilot was conducted from October 2019 to March 2020 and included monthly participant feedback. Although the survey participant group was small, the survey findings suggested that incorporating telework as an option offered benefits to employees without diminishing workplace productivity. Later in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted planned CCP activities and necessitated a large push for many County employees to work remotely.

By June 2020 1,452 County employees were working remotely, and to assess how these workers were faring, the CCP launched a teleworking survey. Over the course of two weeks 625 participants, including employees and managers, provided feedback with over 300 written comments.

The pandemic challenged the County workforce and it was important to understand more about the employee experience during COVID. As a result, in the Fall of 2020 the C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey was launched. This broader workforce assessment reached 1,848 employees and the survey provided detailed information about employee needs and challenges during the pandemic. This survey netted over 3,000 written comments.

In January 2021, as a part of the COOP/reopening process, the CoHR, General Services, County Executive, and County Counsel Departments convened a work group focused on: reviewing the data, collecting more data, assessing the needs of the County workforce, and preparing a report with recommendations to the Board.

Clean Commute Executive Report

This report highlights the Clean Commute Program accomplishments to date, including but not limited to the development and implementation of new channels of communication to reach new and existing employees, the launching of educational events via webinars and other remote learning experiences, and the installation of bicycle repair stations on campuses in downtown Santa Barbara and Santa Maria. The report also set forth the results of the teleworking pilot program and the COVID-19 teleworking survey. Some key points from the surveys included:

- Incorporating regular telework into employees' schedules offers a benefit for employees without negatively impacting productivity or operations.
- Respondents recognized the benefits of telework for organizational and employee wellbeing, which include the following:
 - Reduced commute times and increased employee satisfaction
 - Organizational resiliency during emergencies
 - Sustained increased productivity and reduced distractions
 - Reduced employee vehicle miles traveled

- Respondents felt the County of Santa Barbara effectively expanded telework to applicable positions in response to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders while providing for employee health and safety.

The pandemic forced the County to quickly adopt a remote work model. Based on the survey results, it appeared the County was able to transition to remote work successfully. Respondents identified common challenges which consisted of equipment and IT issues such as software and forfeiting dual-screen monitors but for the most part, County IT divisions effectively supported remote workers and launched a survey to better understand employees needs around IT support and are working on implementing solutions. The results of the survey helped to better understand the equipment and technology needs of the remote worker beyond the pandemic.

C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey Report

The pandemic challenged the workforce. The County was interested in learning more about the employee experience during COVID and how the County could support employees. As a result, in the Fall of 2020 the C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey was launched. The report highlights the key findings of the COVID-19 Workforce Assessment based on the four initial research questions posed: 1. How are employees managing during COVID-19? 2. What are employees' primary concerns and challenges? 3. What do employees need to overcome the challenges associated with working during the pandemic? 4. How well is the County of Santa Barbara doing as an employer responding to the needs and safety of employees during the pandemic? The assessment report also identified the following recommendations for County:

1. Ensure consistent and uniform policies to create equitable implementation of safe policies.
2. Support employee wellbeing during COVID-19 by developing innovative strategies to manage employee stress and reset expectations about County operations.
3. Engage managers to implement creative, consistent policies, address employee concerns, and to advocate for their own needs during the pandemic (and afterwards)
4. Address child care and caregiving challenges of employees during COVID-19.
5. Explore, and create a plan to invest in long-term child care and caregiving support strategies.
6. Distribute the survey at least quarterly to track changes in employee perceptions, stress levels, needs, and other benchmarks.

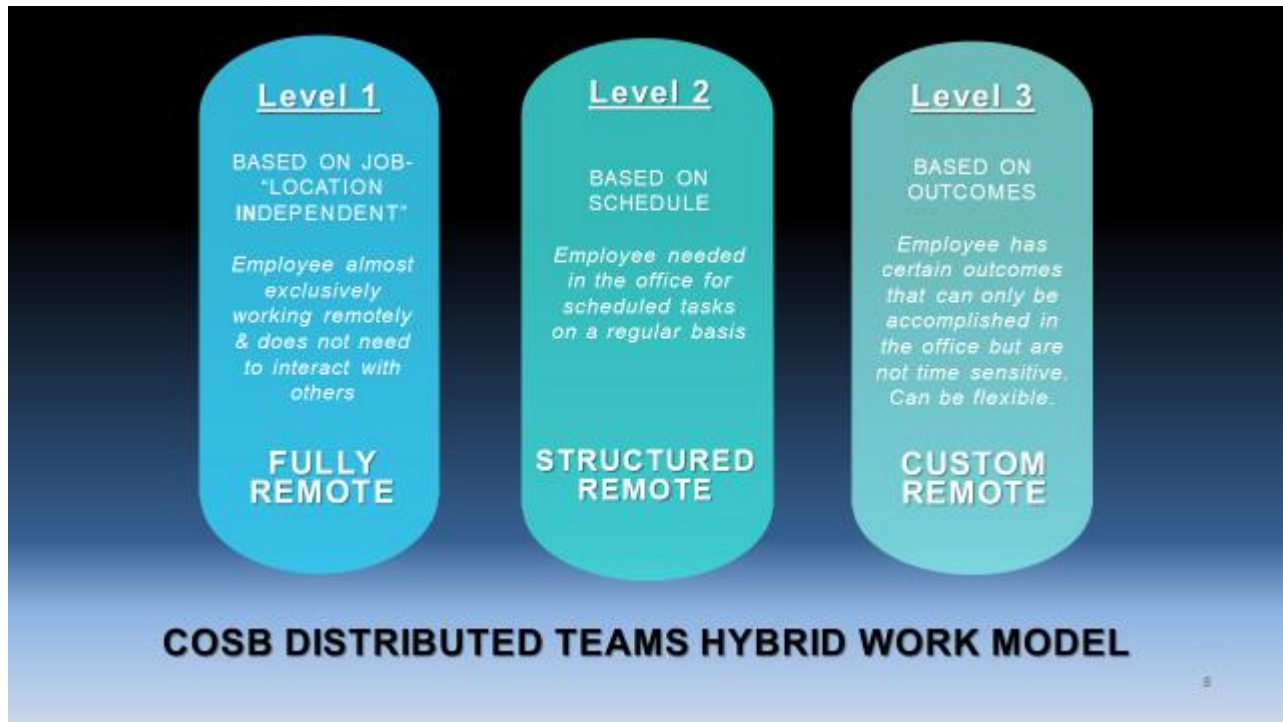
Below are a few strategies that have already been implemented to address several of the identified recommendations while alleviating the pressures employees are currently experiencing while still focusing on health and safety in the workplace and high-quality County service delivery.

- Guidelines regarding employee notification of a potential COVID-19 exposure in the workplace have been established, which address employees' concerns and fears of exposure to COVID-19 at work.
- CoHR has established a one-stop intranet site for resources related to COVID matters.
- In May a virtual wellness fair will be available to support employees based on topics identified throughout the survey and open comment sections.
- During the month of March, several virtual COVID-19 Workforce Assessment information sessions will be offered where employees will be presented the survey findings and can participate in discussions regarding the survey results.

- Resources are being sought to facilitate the ongoing collection of employee feedback through pulse surveys on very specific topics identified throughout the Covid-19 assessment survey.
- For the 2022 plan year, the Benefits & Wellness Division is researching potential vendors who can provide the workforce childcare support and/or resources.
- The Organizational and Talent Development Division will contract for management training specifically related to building competencies in remote worker supervision and building resilient teams.

Distributed Teams Hybrid Work Model

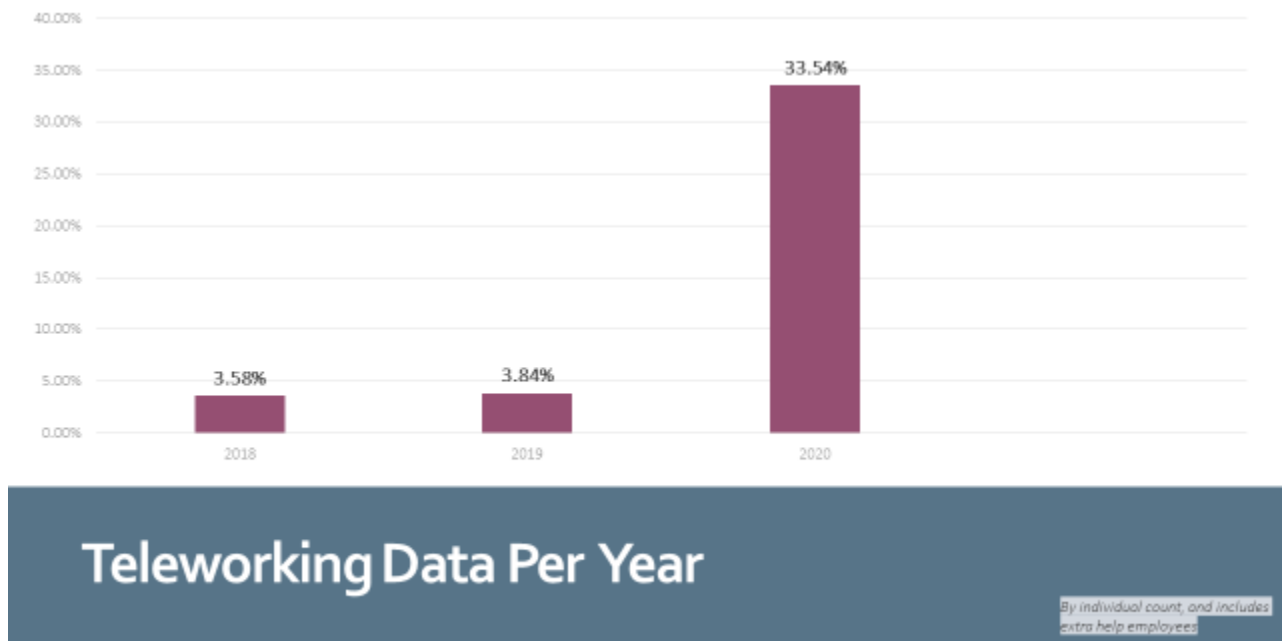
Although the County currently operates under an existing Telework Policy, both the Clean Commute Pilot Teleworking Survey as well as the larger Teleworking Survey of June 2020 indicated the need for revisions to the complex nature of both the existing policy and the accompanying Teleworking Agreement. Both documents continue to undergo extensive reviews with stakeholder groups. However, one of the concepts that has surfaced is the development of the Distributed Teams Hybrid Work Model. This model refines the existing teleworking arrangement by creating a more nuanced look at teleworking by offering the flexibility of three levels of remote work.



Level 1 of the Distributed Teams Hybrid Work Model is based on the concept of a remote worker almost exclusively working from home because the need for them to interact with others is very infrequent. Level 1 is referred to as Fully Remote. Examples of this might be an Information Technology staff person who can perform their job from a remote location and rarely needs to come into the office. Level 2 is based on the employee’s scheduled work. Typically, a Level 2 Distributed Teams Hybrid Remote worker is required to be in the office on a particular schedule at the same time of the week or month. This could be the case for someone who performs Board docketing duties and needs to be in the office every Thursday that is a docket day. This is considered more of a Structured Remote. Finally, Level 3 is for workers whose work can only be accomplished in the office but is not time

sensitive or schedule dependent. This would be something like opening the mail, or filing that doesn't have a deadline. This is more of a Custom Remote situation.

Staff proposes the Distributed Teams Hybrid Work Model as a response to the post-pandemic work environment. Not all functions lend themselves to teleworking arrangements, but, in the future, it is highly unlikely that the County will see the extremely low levels of teleworking that existed during the two years prior to the pandemic. The Board has made concerted efforts to improve County roadway congestion and emission of GHG through their support of the Sustainability Division and programs such as the Clean Commute Program. Continued support from the Board in the area of workplace flexibility will not only further the County's sustainability goals, but greater workplace flexibility will also underscore the County's transformative Renew efforts that compel us to revision the County's future, respond to business challenges, and redesign policies, programs and workspaces to better meet the external forces and changes.



Statement of Commitment to Workplace Flexibility

The attached Statement of Commitment to Workplace Flexibility demonstrates the County of Santa Barbara's recognition that a flexible work environment keeps the organization resilient and operational in a changing world. The County understands the interconnectedness between a healthy organization that is able to effectively respond to a rapidly changing environment and a workforce that has the opportunity to meet their individual and personal demands with dignity. This statement of commitment is designed to help facilitate the process of finding creative ways to incorporate flexibility as an integral part of the way we provide public services.

This departmental item identifies several strategies to embed flexibility into the County culture such as Employee Wellness Programs, Employee Pulse Surveys, Remote Work Policy, Flexible Workspaces, etc.

Next Steps

CoHR will develop and revise applicable County policy, especially in the area of remote work. After appropriate meet and confer with the employee groups, CoHR will return to the Board with updated policies for review and/or adoption.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No

Fiscal Analysis:

Please refer budget request for workforce training and engagement tools for \$110,000 to County Executive Office for budget consideration

Attachments:

- Attachment A- Clean Commute Executive Report;
 B- C-19 Workforce Assessment Survey Report;
 C- Statement of Commitment to Workplace Flexibility
 D- PowerPoint Final Post Pandemic County Workforce Strategies

Authored by: Maria Elena De Guevara, Human Resources Director