



Michigan Public Employer Labor  
Relations Association

# Reimagining the Future of Work

**Considerations for Remote and Flexible Work Programs**

September 25, 2020

# | Today's Webinar

**What COVID-19 Brought us**

**Flexible/ Remote Workplace Benefits**

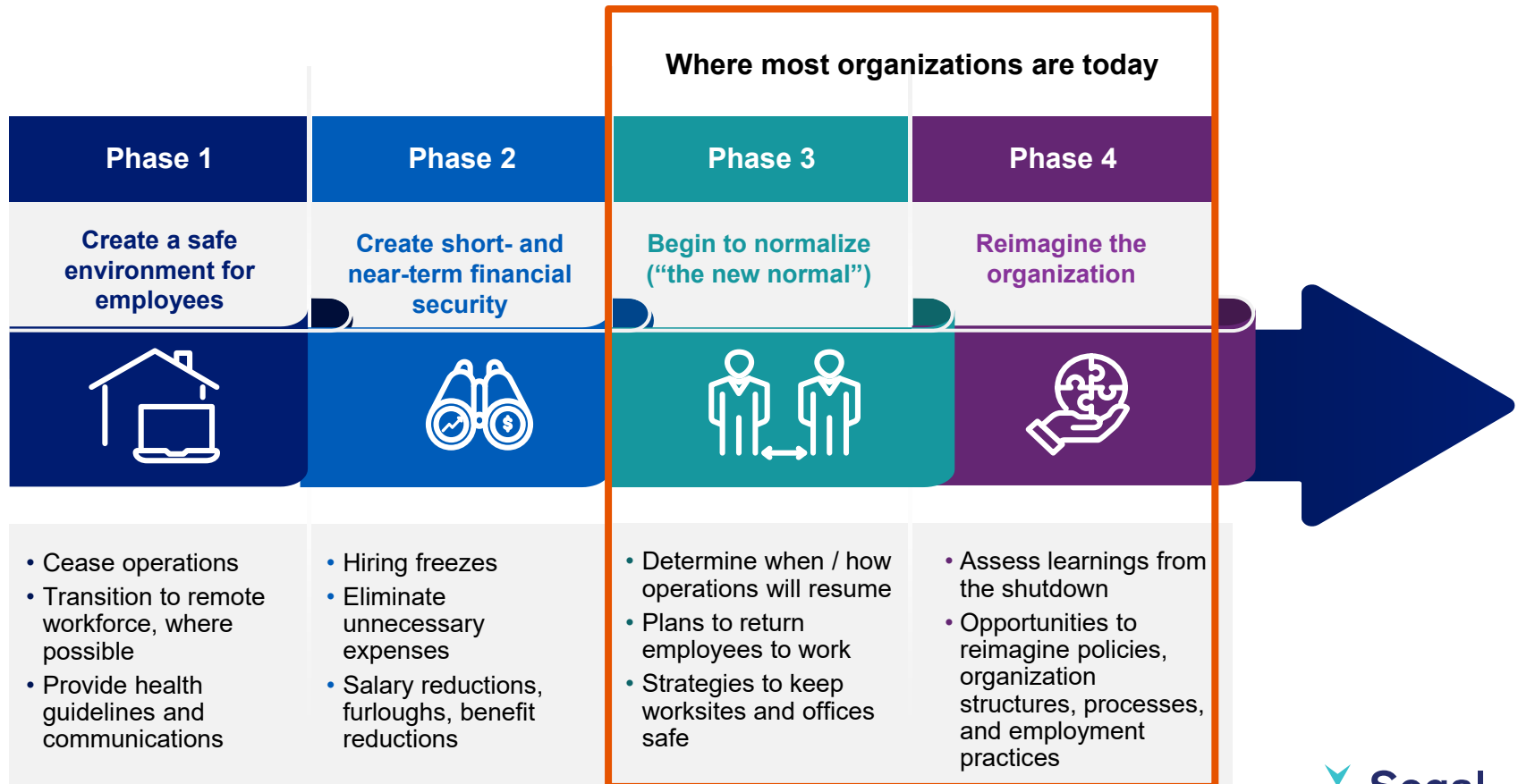
**Flexible/ Remote Workplace Implications and Opportunities**

**Orientation for Remote Workers**

**Questions**

# COVID-19 Evolution

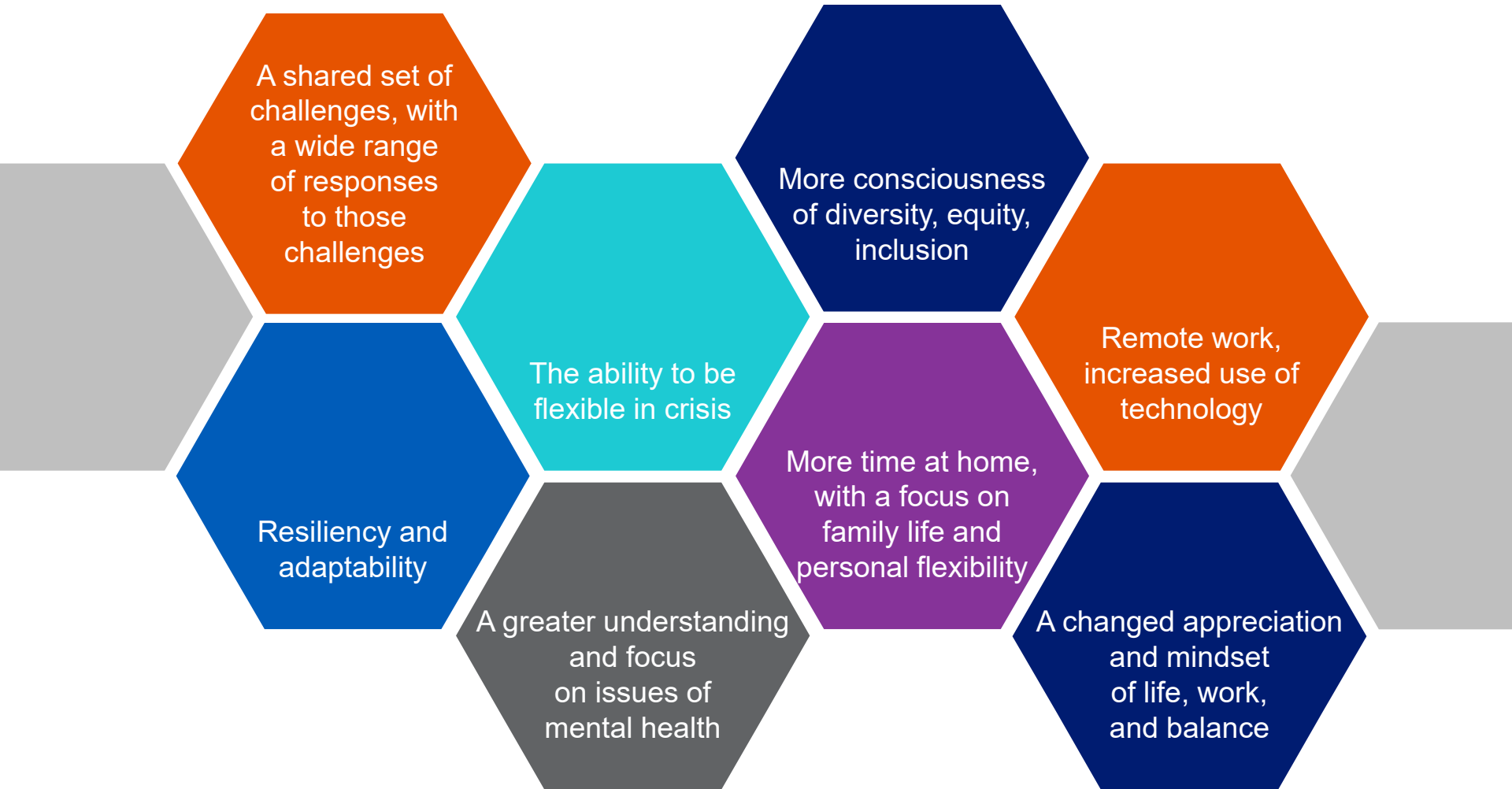
- The 2020 pandemic has fundamentally changed the nature of the workplace
- These significant shifts in the workforce present an opportunity to rethink traditional approaches, and how benefits like flexible and remote work can be leveraged in the future to support more efficient operations while meeting growing employee demand and expectation for more flexible work



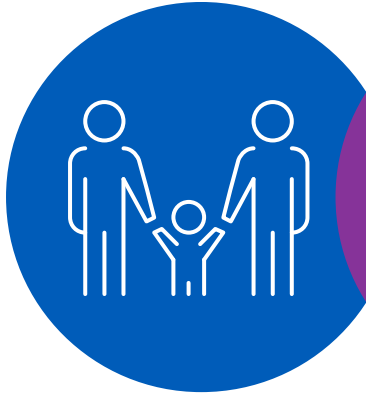
To what extent is your organization thinking about reimagining the future of work and adopting remote or flexible work options?

- A) Not considering making changes at this time**
- B) Interested in exploring potential changes**
- C) Exploring or assessing potential options**
- D) Beginning to make some changes and adopting some flexible or remote work practices**
- E) Well along the path of adopting a remote or flexible work environment**

# What 2020 Brought Us



# Emerging Trends



## Reframing of what really matters to employees

- Flexibility in work environment and schedule
- Focus on results and outcomes
- Convenience, reduced commutes
- More family time and increased focus on value of time



## Financial implications of remote work-reduced cost/ financial burden

- Space
- Phone/Internet/ Utilities
- Reduced Headcount (either due to increased efficiency or reduced need for in-person services)
- Reduced travel and miscellaneous operating costs



## More automation and increased efficiency, effectiveness and reduced cost

- Increased use of AI/ reliance on technology
- Increased creativity and flexibility in meeting techniques



## Additional benefits of remote work

- Reduced environmental impacts and carbon footprint
- Elevated opportunities to increase diversity of workforce- more candidate pools, more pipelines for talent (ethnic/racial, disabilities, gender, background, location, etc.)



## Ability to leverage flexible work as a valued benefit

- Greater expectations for workplace flexibility as part of the employee value proposition
- Employees will likely look for opportunities elsewhere if their workplace is not meeting their needs

# Benefits of Flexible Work

Telecommuting and remote work options can benefit both employees and employers, including:



Enhanced productivity



Reduced costs for employers (office space, energy)



Reduced costs for employees (transportation, parking, extended childcare hours)



Increased employee morale and engagement



Increased healthy lifestyles and work/life balance



Reduced commuting challenges



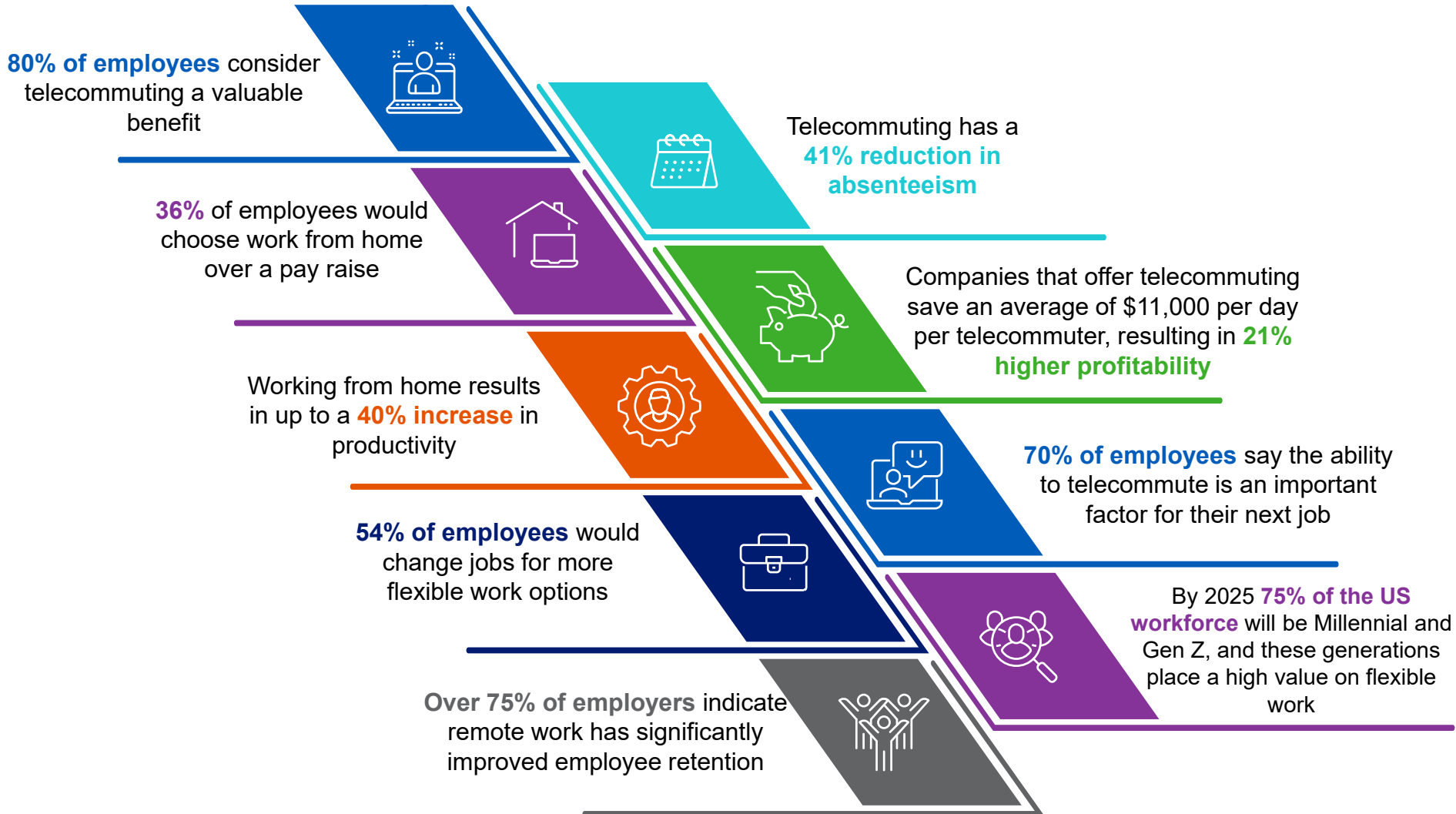
Reduced environmental impact



Reduced absenteeism

# Benefits of Flexible Work

Research shows significant benefits of flexible and remote work:



# Poll Question

What would be the greatest area of interest or benefit to your organization in adopting a remote or flexible work program?

- A) Reducing costs and/or staffing levels
- B) Gaining operational efficiencies
- C) Expanding flexibility of services to customers/stakeholders
- D) Increasing competitiveness in attracting and recruiting talent
- E) Enhancing diversity of candidate pools and the workforce
- F) Retention of top talent
- G) Improving levels of employee satisfaction and engagement



# Options for Flexible and Remote Work



# Identifying Roles that Are Suited for Remote Work

Many work roles and tasks can be performed effectively in remote settings

## Possible

- Accounting and financial analysis
- Administrative work (communication, scheduling, travel arrangements)
- Finance and HR support
- Counseling services
- Client and customer service
- Course design and online teaching
- Creative work such as writing and design
- Information technology support
- Research and analysis
- Sales
- Marketing

## May Not be Possible

- Tasks that require in-person support or direct customer-facing roles
- Roles deemed essential
- Public health and safety
- Work that requires onsite equipment or materials

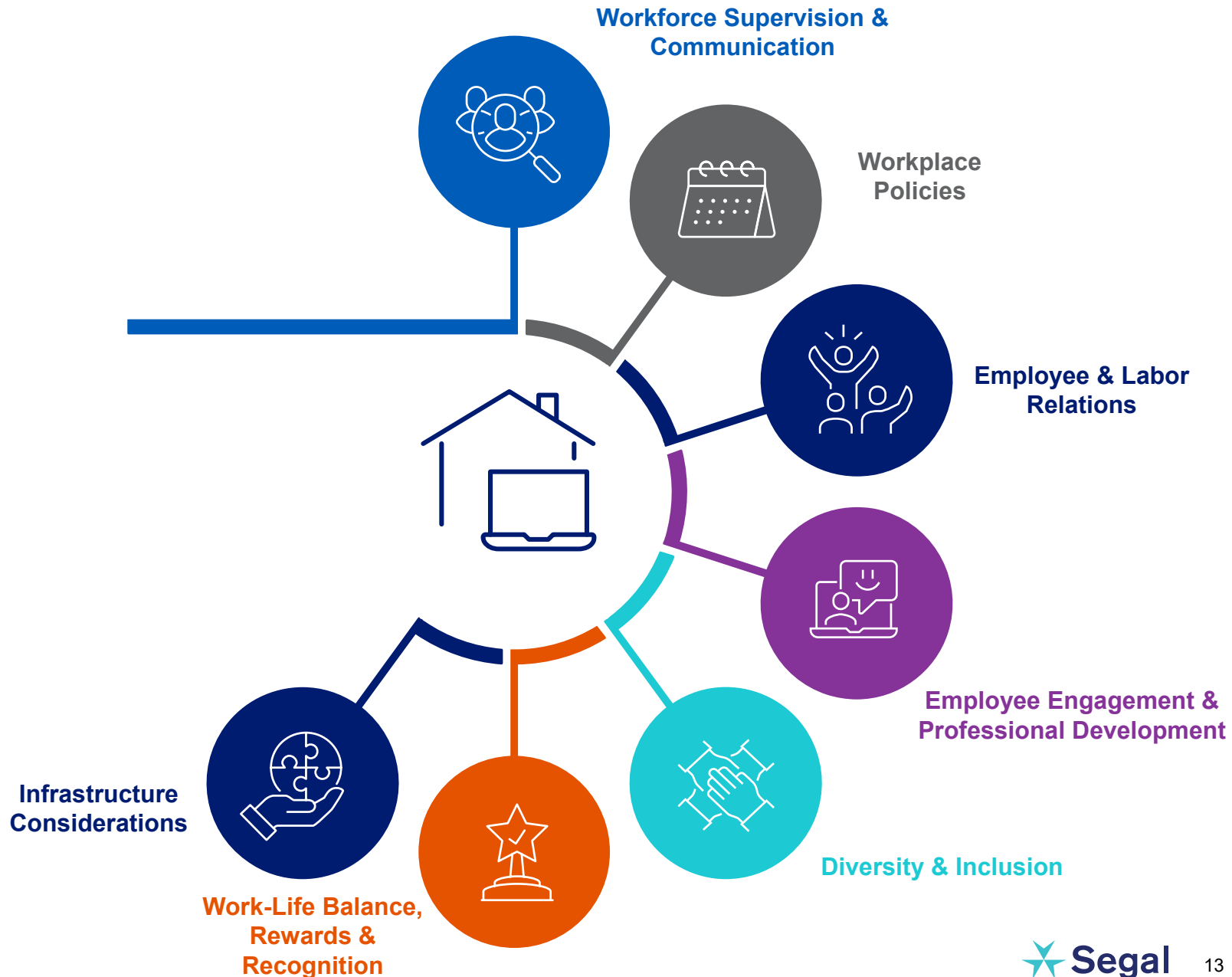
Flexible work arrangements may require modifications to collective bargaining agreements/be considered a negotiable term and condition of employment

# Best Practice Remote Flexible Programs

## Best Practices in Flexible and Remote Work Programs

- High trust management culture that focuses on results and outcomes vs. activity
- Diversity of flexible work options and programs that include flex schedule options in addition to telecommuting options
- Well-established security infrastructure, practices, and policies to support flexible work
- Variety of communication and collaboration tools and platforms (effective remote platforms, chat tools, etc.)
- Clear guidelines, policies, and processes that govern remote and flexible work
- Robust training programs and resources for managers and employees
- Targeted strategies and approaches for ensuring employee engagement and the desired work culture
- Focus on modern performance management and recognition practices
- Robust wellness and work-life support and resources
- Easy employee access to internal resources to support remote and flexible work (intranet, self-service tools, etc.)
- Clearly defined employee value proposition and employer branding strategies
- Processes, mechanisms, and metrics to evaluate the success of the program on an ongoing basis

# Remote Work Opportunities and Implications



# Workforce Supervision & Communication

## *Engaging and Communicating with Employees*

**With a remote workforce, there is a risk of reduced information flow and reduced opportunities for collaboration and innovation. Ensure that employees and managers have effective tools**



- Agree on which platforms will be used for various forms of communication (for example: Zoom or Microsoft Teams for internal video meetings, Google Docs for team collaboration, email for general matters, texts for urgent messages)
- Establish standard response times (For example: email will be acknowledged within two hours)
- Create communication protocols related to style (formal vs. informal writing, acronyms such as NNTR: "No Need to Respond" or INT: "Input Needed Today")
- Schedule one-one-one supervisor/employee meetings and team meetings at least weekly
- Create opportunities for small group conversations during online meetings (small gatherings, video conference breakout rooms)

# Workforce Supervision & Communication

## *Supervising and Managing Performance*

**Managing remote and flexible workers can be more challenging because it is more difficult to observe activities and measure performance**

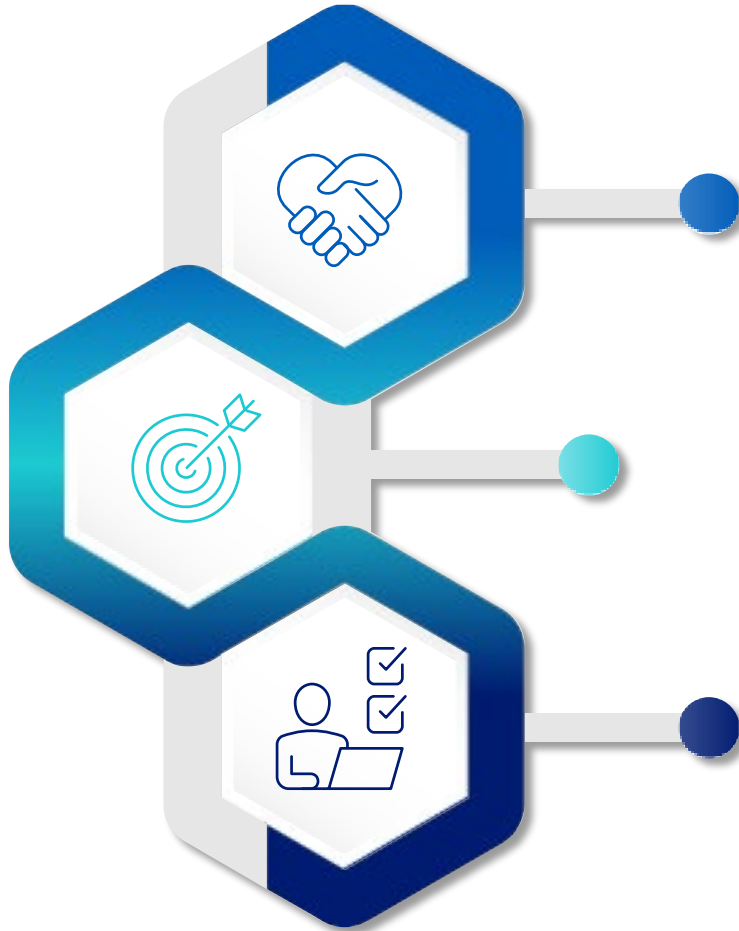
### **Implications**

- High levels of trust are required to successfully support a flexible work environment
- Managers may assume employees are not working as hard if they are not directly observed
- It can be more difficult to motivate some remote workers and keep them focused
  - Some employees thrive in a remote environment, but others that require more structure may struggle
- Activity and “busyness” can mistakenly be perceived for productivity when assessing performance
- Traditional methods for setting goals may not be effective in establishing clear expectations for flexible workers
- Traditional performance evaluation programs that provide an annual formal evaluation may be insufficient to measure performance in meaningful ways

# Workforce Supervision & Communication

## *Supervising and managing Performance*

- Managing remote and flexible workers can be more challenging because it is more difficult to observe activities and measure performance



### **Modernize Performance Management Practices**

- Establish clear goals and expectations that can be easily measured
- Identify performance standards that have clear metrics/measures
- Have clear guidelines and policies that outline terms and govern performance expectations
- Consider replacing the once per year review with more frequent performance check ins

### **Focus on Results Rather than Activity**

- Focus on work accomplished rather than hours clocked
- Assume employees will deliver on their commitments
- Avoid the temptation to “prove” employees are really working

### **Provide Regular Coaching and Feedback**

- Focus on ongoing coaching and informal feedback on performance
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with employees for updates and to provide guidance and informal feedback
- Have regular check-in meetings to discuss progress against goals and barriers to productivity and performance

# Policy Needs

**Workplace policies may need to be created or revised to support remote work options. Key content to include in policies may include the following:**



## **General Telecommuting and Remote Work Policy**

- Clarify which roles are eligible for remote work
- Establish clear guidelines and protocols for each employee group and bargaining unit
- Detail which equipment, tools, and supplies will be provided or reimbursed
- Describe physical work environment requirements (IT security, home safety standards)
- Outline offsite security and confidentiality expectations
- Explain potential for limitations on remote workspaces based on roles or tasks (such as coffee shops or areas where data may be clearly visible)



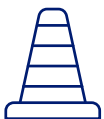
## **Time Reporting and Overtime Policy**

- Establish clear guidance about hours of operation and what constitutes hours worked
- Detail the mechanism for non-exempt employees to report daily hours worked in order to meet Fair Labor Standards Act obligations
- State that overtime requires management approval in advance



## **Americans with Disabilities Act Policy**

- Ensure telecommuting and remote work options are referenced in the organization's existing Americans with Disabilities Act Policy and State regulations



## **Workplace Safety Policy**

- Outline workers' compensation coverage and accident/injury reporting requirements for remote employees

# Employee and Labor Relations

**Remote and flexible work presents several employee and labor relations considerations**

## **Implications**

- Collective bargaining limitations present potential inequities in access to remote and flexible work arrangements across the workforce
- Loss of connection with in person contact to address progressive discipline and performance issues
- Potential reduction in ability to observe and manage interpersonal conflict and to assess employees in crisis or acute need
- Potential reduction in number of attendance-related employee relations matters and number of interpersonal conflict issues
- Improved timelines and efficiency in scheduling grievance and disciplinary matters and arbitrations without need to be physically present
- Impact on the strength of unions and ability to organize
- Opportunity to leverage remote work as a benefit in negotiations

## **Considerations**

- Conduct a comprehensive review of collective bargaining agreements and policies to determine feasibility and barriers
- Consider alignment of flexible work to longer-term bargaining strategy
- Build a business case and engage unions early in the process to gain buy-in and support
- Begin with a pilot among non-union workers



# Employee Engagement

**Remote and flexible work require rethinking your approach to culture and engagement**

## **Implications**

- Employee satisfaction will likely increase for employees working from home or participating in flexible work programs
- Remote work arrangements can bolster diversity recruiting strategies but make building an inclusive culture more challenging
- Remote workers can feel isolated, disconnected, or left out, especially if some coworkers are still working on site
- Employees may feel a strained connection to the mission and goals, and thus potential reduced loyalty and alignment to broader goals
- Lack of ability to provide consistent offerings may lead to perceptions of inequity and impact morale

## **Considerations**

- Provide training and guidance to supervisors with a remote workforce
- Provide a range of flexible options to maximize participation
- Be intentional about supporting employees in establishing productive relationships with colleagues, regardless of location
- Regularly assess and measure engagement and satisfaction and develop an approach to address results
- Design meetings, activities, and events that lend themselves to “virtual participation”

# Training and Professional Development

**Remote and flexible work require modern and diverse approaches to training and development**

## **Implications**

- Traditional class-room based training approaches won't be sufficient to address the needs of a remote workforce
- When employees are “out of sight,” they may feel excluded from career and professional development opportunities
- It may be more challenging to mentor and develop remote workers, assess promotion readiness, and ensure consistent career development opportunities

## **Considerations**

- Establish online and on demand training opportunities
  - Online learning and courses (LinkedIn Learning, certifications)
- Ensure effective and easily accessible tools for onsite training
  - Video and audioconferencing
  - Screen sharing and recording capabilities
- Provide a diverse range of training options to meet the multiple needs of the workforce (onsite team development events, participation in professional associations and conferences, etc.)
- Be intentional about formal mentoring opportunities for remote employees

# Diversity & Inclusion



## Moving to remote work allows for increased opportunities for diversity and inclusion

### Implications

- Flexible and remote work may bolster diversity efforts
  - Remote work may significantly expand candidate pools and diversity recruiting options, and allow for a more geographically diverse workforce
  - May provide new opportunities for and better serve employees with disabilities
  - Socioeconomic barriers to employment are likely reduced with remote work
- Remote work environments may make it more challenging to ensure an inclusive work culture

### Considerations

- Expand recruiting strategies and pipelines by casting a wider net geographically to increase access to diverse talent
- Leverage remote work to expand labor pools and allow for hiring of diverse talent without relocation
- Inclusion efforts will need to be more intentional to ensure that all employees have a sense of belonging
- Identify specific strategies to engage remote workers in events, activities and programs that keep employees connected and support an inclusive culture

# Work-Life Balance, Rewards, and Recognition

**Moving away from a traditional work environment and schedule requires a shift in how employees are supported and rewarded**

## **Implications**

- Remote workers may put in more hours and have a risk of burnout
- Child care needs may drive the need to offer more flexible work options post-Covid, but also may present unique challenges and demands for remote workers
- Traditional wellness and work-life programs may not sufficiently meet the needs of a remote workforce
- Legacy benefits, rewards, and recognition practices and rewards may be insufficient to motivate and reward remote employees

## **Considerations**

- Ensure clear leave policies and encourage remote workers to take time off
- Set boundaries outside of normal business hours
- Consider having occasional office days or regular in-person meetings where possible to keep remote workers connected and engaged
- Incorporate mental well-being and strategies for managing work-life balance into wellness initiatives
- Leverage EAP programs and resources
- Explore home services and perks to offer remote workers (home office stipend, monthly subscriptions, etc.)
- Provide child care resources and support where possible
- Update and broaden recognition programs

What is the biggest challenge or barrier to adopting or expanding remote or flexible work for your organization?

- A) Lack of necessary technology, tools, and infrastructure
- B) Collective bargaining restrictions
- C) Lack of management support
- D) Potential impact on productivity and operations
- E) Lack of necessary training resources and tools
- F) Current processes and policies do not support a flexible work environment



# Infrastructure Considerations

**Moving to a remote work environment will present a variety of infrastructure issues and opportunities to consider:**

- Ensure employees have sufficient technology and equipment that provides **secure** access to video and online conferencing tools, enterprise technology platforms, project management tools, and necessary software licenses
  - Create protocols for providing necessary technology updates
  - Develop clear policies on security requirements and who will bear the cost of sufficient home internet are critical
  - Establish requirements for home security for confidential or protected information (file cabinet drawers with locks, a home security system)
- Consider reimbursement for necessary furniture and equipment (a quality chair, printers, dual monitors) and stipends for excess phone data
- Provide guidance on ergonomically appropriate work stations
- Ensure the organization's information technology team is equipped to provide support to remote employees
- Determine whether organizational insurance covers equipment such as employer-owned laptops, tablets, and other equipment
- Review and revise Workers Compensation policies and processes as needed
- Reimagine how vacant office space and parking can be utilized or repurposed
- Determine how technology and AI could impact staffing, roles, and services long-term

# Orientation Programs for Remote/Flexible Workers and Supervisors

**When adopting a flexible and remote work program, provide a range of training resources including a “Remote/Flexible Work Orientation” that includes the following elements:**



Review of the organization’s policies related to remote/flexible work arrangements



Reporting rules for personal injuries



Demonstrated instructions on how to operate and maintain telecommuting equipment



Tutorials on how to access resources, benefits, and training



Preferred method(s) of communication



Schedule, including core work hours, and immediate availability



Guidelines for notifying the company or IT of equipment, technological, and security issues



Managing hours worked and overtime (including breaks)



Data security and protocols



Manager or team check-in expectations

Questions can be directed to:

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