



# BEING PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED

A Pandemic Planning Manual  
For Small Nonprofits

April 2021





The views expressed in this report are views of Literacy Link South Central and do not necessarily reflect those of the province. The Government of Ontario is in no way bound by any recommendations contained in this document.

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District School Board of Niagara	Spark Employment Services
Women & Children's Shelter of Barrie	Youth Haven
Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network	YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin
Big Brothers and Big Sisters of London	Literacy Lambton
Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre	Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre
The John Howard Society of Simcoe & Muskoka	Rideau-Ottawa Valley Learning Network (ROVLN)
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# Introduction

From the onset of the pandemic, executives and staff of the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) sector and other service nonprofits across Canada found themselves scrambling to keep their services afloat as COVID-19 posed detrimental effects on their organizations. Organizations found their budgets strained due to an increased need for tools and supports. A strained budget became the normality rather than the exception for many.

## **The LLSC Pandemic Planning Manual**

This manual is courtesy of the Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) Pandemic Planning Manual team. The Pandemic Planning Manual is an up-to-date compendium of resources, information, and general recommendations tailored for LBS nonprofits and other community service nonprofits. These organizations can benefit from a thorough guide designed to help them maintain optimal functioning during challenging times.

## **Its Purpose**

The purpose of this manual is to assist LBS and other service nonprofits to navigate through the ongoing operational disruptions and challenges that emerged as a result of COVID-19. There is also a place for it in a broader crisis-management context unrelated to pandemic response as this manual contains content that applies to general emergency preparation. Readers need to be aware that this manual is not a replacement for policies, protocols, and procedures that are already in place, which are unique across organizations, but rather a supplementary resource that will allow for increased opportunity to gain access to beneficial information and resources that may otherwise be time-consuming to look for independently.

## **Its Importance**

Our eagerness to devise a document that targets pandemic-related workplace disruptions, as well as disruptions caused by other hazardous situations, is what brought this manual to life. Releasing a well-researched plan is a form of proactivity that serves to alleviate confusion and concerns expressed by smaller LBS agencies. We believe this manual will increase the confidence of its users in their pandemic preparedness. It will bolster their ability to respond to challenges and enable them to improve and sustain the quality of their services during a pandemic.

## **Layout**

The main themes that make up this manual were chosen strategically by a thorough analysis of the existing pandemic resources and literature online. We identified key areas where nonprofits appeared to struggle, and these themes guided our research and helped structure the needs assessment script

our research team used during the interview process. A brief outline of each section’s relevance to the manual is as follows:

1. Communication/Oversight from board members on policy creation: this plays a crucial role in keeping staff informed about updates.
2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): for use against the COVID-19 virus.
3. Mental Health: addressing the basic needs of individuals providing and receiving services.
4. Clients’ Basic Needs: identifying supports for clients.
5. Technology and Stable Internet: addressing the toll the pandemic emergency had on funding and grants for necessary ‘remote work’ supports.
6. Transportation: addressing how COVID-19 forced LBS and other nonprofits to change the setting of their service delivery, and to consider the reluctance of people to use public forms of transportation.
7. Fundraising: to offer LBS and other nonprofit staff a gateway into helpful fundraising advice and resources as fundraisers and donations have reduced markedly since the start of the pandemic.



## Methodology

In preparation for writing this manual, the team conducted research from an extensive group of primary and secondary sources. In the first stage of research we conducted a general investigation of existing pandemic response plans, especially plans developed in the wake of COVID-19. We were interested in understanding how organizations responded quickly to a crisis that was still unfolding. We wanted to know how organizations shifted to remote or online work, how they communicated with staff and clients, and how they reopened safely, if at all. We looked at best practices and policy guides, and municipal, provincial, and federal guidelines. We directed research toward specific topics (now manual sections) that Literacy Link South Central identified as key to a pandemic response manual.

In the second stage of research we conducted 34 interviews with nonprofit organizations from both within and outside the Literacy and Basic Skills field. Our interviews focused on the topics which now form the core sections of the manual. These interviews were key to developing our recommendations. The interviews provided first-hand accounts of on-going crisis response and of the challenges and resiliencies of nonprofit organizations. These interviews were conducted via Zoom and over the telephone, using a series of questions the team compiled based on the secondary research.

After conducting the interviews, the team developed a feedback survey which was emailed to all interviewees. This survey was provided to allow all the organizations the opportunity to ensure the accuracy of the information included in the manual. As feedback was received, we incorporated responses and suggestions into the draft of the manual.

The final version of the manual represents months of careful research, writing, and design from our dedicated team with the support of Literacy Link South Central.



## Policy Creation and Board Oversight

One of the many difficulties of a crisis is the revelation of gaps in organizational practices or procedures. While some gaps may be easily remedied, others may need a lot more attention to be addressed effectively.

Early adaptation to standard operating procedures can help an organization confront a crisis like a pandemic more quickly. For example, early in 2020, one organization began monitoring news about COVID-19 more closely. It became apparent that the virus was a wide-spread issue and could lead to lockdowns in North America. Seeing this, the organization purchased Zoom access for the office to prepare for the likelihood of remote meetings.

A pre-emptive response to a crisis is not always possible. With the lessons of a year of challenges and change, and with the resilience of the Literacy and Basic Skills community, this manual provides recommendations on several areas of operating that have been impacted by closures and the need for social distancing. The policies of your office will need to be developed within the protocols of your organization. In addition to the considerations provided in this manual, your organization may also need to consider new or modified policies around:

- Staff leave
- Remote or work-from-home regulations
- Health and safety
- Operations of programs and services
- Communication and social media
- Cybersecurity and IT
- Client privacy and confidentiality in a remote environment

For LBS organizations that deliver services directly to the community there was a recognition that client files did not always have up-to-date contact information, such as email addresses or preferred/alternate methods of contact. Additionally, some LBS practitioners noted that it would be helpful to know if a client has a support person who can help them navigate technology and remote services.

While most organizations interviewed indicated that they had an emergency plan in place, many had not considered the possibility of a widespread airborne illness. It will be imperative to ensure that, within the policy-creation mechanisms provided by your organization, policies reflect the need to cope with a state of emergency caused by airborne illness.

It is also important to be aware that an emergency caused by airborne illness will come with challenges such as the need for face masks or other protective equipment. As we have seen, mask regulations can be contentious for some individuals or communities. One of the organizations interviewed indicated that they sought out re-training regarding human rights and how to accommodate issues around mask policies. As well, with the

development of new vaccines (and potentially increased encouragement for existing vaccines such as a flu shot), organizations will likely need to consider how to address the vaccine status of both employees and workplace visitors. The appendix of this manual includes a sample vaccination policy for your office.

Broadly speaking, a Board of Directors is legally responsible for the overall governance of an organization. Therefore, all changes to policy and issues such as the budget must be handled by the Board. Continuing with Board meetings, including the Annual General Meeting, will be crucial for an organization's ability to operate efficiently in a crisis. As with the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting in-person may not always be possible. It is necessary to review the Board constitution or bylaws and ensure there is policy in place to support remote meetings as well as the recording of those meetings if necessary.

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most significant concerns for organizations was financial. For organizations that require two signatures for financial transactions, social distancing and remote meetings made obtaining these signatures more complicated. Within the policy review process, a mechanism to address financial continuity should be discussed. In addition, while some organizations reported having an excellent relationship with their Board of Directors, others experienced Board disengagement or complicated communications. Additional professional development opportunities for Boards of Directors around their roles and responsibilities in a crisis would strengthen these working relationships.

As with any situation, if there is any question around legal responsibilities or liabilities, it is recommended that an organization or Board seek proper legal counsel.

## **Suggestions for Things to Consider in Preparation for an Emergency**

- Do you have a clear communications strategy for your organization? Communications strategy should include how you communicate internally (to all members of the organization) and externally (to stakeholders, network partners, clients, learners, and the community).
- Do you have up-to-date contact information for all employees?
- Do you have up-to-date contact information for learners/clients and a note about preferred/alternate methods of contact (if applicable)?
- Are all employees aware of the expectations related to their positions?
- Do all employees know where to find the policies and procedures that govern the organization?
- Are all Board members aware of the expectations of their role with the Board of Directors?
- Are all Board members familiar with the mission and work of the organization?
- Do you have a remote work or work-from-home policy?
- Does the Executive Director have up-to-date contact information for the Chair of the Board of Directors (and vice versa)?
- Does the Board of Directors have cloud storage or a dedicated server for the documents necessary to fulfill their duties remotely?
- Does the Board of Directors have a bylaw that addresses holding remote meetings? Can these meetings be recorded?

## **Key Resources for Literacy and Basic Skills Nonprofits:**

Succession Planning for Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies and Networks

This resource was created by Literacy Link South Central to help nonprofits with the succession planning process. This resource contains checklists and forms that can help an organization understand their overall operations and preparedness for change. Please contact Literacy Link South Central for a copy of the Succession Planning Manual: [literacylink@llsc.on.ca](mailto:literacylink@llsc.on.ca)

### [Community Literacy of Ontario's Board Governance Resource Guide](#)

Comprehensive overview of the purpose, work, and responsibilities of a Board of Directors.

### [Sample Policies and Procedures for Community-Based Literacy Organizations](#)

Examples of policies, gathered by Community Literacy of Ontario, that can be easily adapted for your organization.

## **Additional Resources for Nonprofit Organizations and Boards of Directors:**

### [Ontario Nonprofit Network: COVID-19 Resources for Nonprofits](#)

General information for nonprofits in Ontario including information on provincial and federal policies and professional development webinars.

### [How Nonprofits Can Establish Effective Telecommuting Practices](#)

Overview of key issues related to remote work and links to resources especially related to working from home.

### [How Nonprofits Can Foster Digital Resilience](#)

Includes tips, resources, and links especially related to digital privacy, digital security, and working from home.

### [Putting It In Writing: Getting Started With Policies and Procedures](#)

Charity Village resource about the basics of creating policies and procedures.

### [Writing Effective Policies and Procedures](#)

Charity Village online course – a professional development opportunity to assist with writing policies and procedures (fee required).

[Coronavirus Crisis Communication Best Practices for Nonprofits](#)

One-page resource of recommendations for communications strategies for an organization facing a crisis.

[Remote and Flexible Work Toolkit for Employers](#)

Produced by the City of Vancouver; a resource dedicated to assisting employers and employees in transitioning to working from home.

[Imagine Canada: Virtual Board Meetings: 10 Best Practices](#)

A brief guide for hosting effective virtual board meetings.

[BoardSource: How NonProfits and Board Members Can Respond to COVID-19](#)

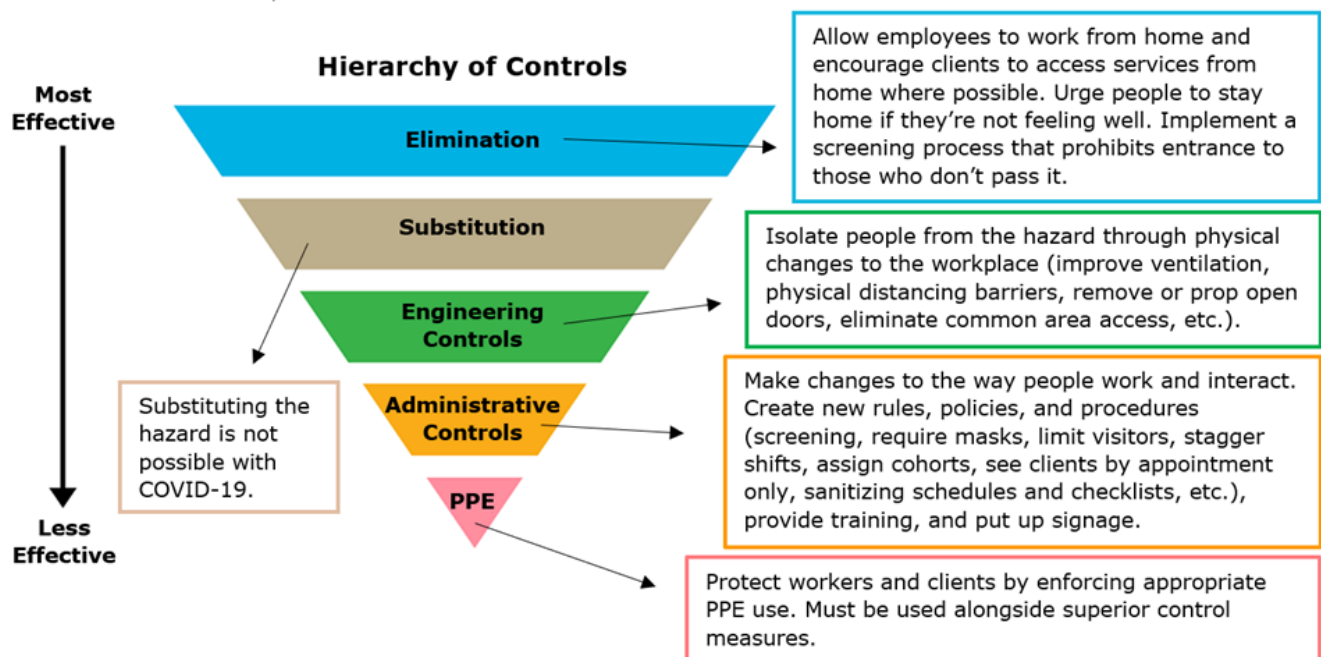
Comprehensive and concise advice for Boards of Directors about adapting the governance of nonprofit organizations in response to COVID-19.



# Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Safety

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) refers to garments or devices that were once worn only by people employed in hazardous occupations and as required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). As a result of COVID-19 (coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2), PPE, or a version of it, is now used globally in various settings.

Within the hierarchy of controls to help minimize or eliminate workplace hazards, PPE is the last measure in a five-step process. When the most effective means of removing or replacing a danger, like contracting a life-threatening virus, is not possible or feasible, PPE is meant to protect whoever wears the equipment from a potential hazard.



The PPE items most frequently used during the pandemic include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Medical gowns
- Medical gloves
- Medical respirators (like N95)
- Medical/surgical/procedural masks
- Eye protection (goggles and safety glasses with side shields)
- Facial protection (masks with built-in eye protection, face shields, masks with visor attachment)

To be ranked as PPE, each item must meet specific standards and be labeled as a “medical-grade” device with a clear statement of its intended use and purpose. In Canada, medical devices are classified

into four groups (Class I, II, III, and IV) based on the risks posed to the users' health and safety. Specifically, Class I items are used as a precaution and protect the user from the lowest potential risk of exposure to infection, whereas Class IV represents the highest risk.

While many masks, for instance, may look similar, not all meet the same level of protection nor are tested to meet any particular standard. Be aware, therefore, when choosing an item in the marketplace if you are required, or desire, to select a medical-grade device.

Briefly, some commonly known items that may or may not be necessary for your workplace or personal life are described as follows:

### **Medical/Isolation Gowns (Class I):**

- Essential for healthcare professionals in clinical settings
- Intended to protect clothing from contagions
- Created to stop pathogens from penetrating the material
- Fabricated to be either washable or disposable
- Not necessary for performing regular activities of daily living

### **Medical Gloves (Class II):**

- Essential for healthcare professionals in clinical settings
- Designed to be disposable, unless labelled otherwise
- Not to be reused, cleaned, or sanitized
- Caution is recommended for proper use, removal, and disposal
- Not recommended for performing regular activities of daily living

### **N95 Masks or Equivalent Medical Respirators (Class I):**

- Ranked the most effective protection for users against contagions
- Captures 95% of airborne particles, bacteria, viruses, etc.
- Features a unique design that fits snugly around the nose and mouth
- Made from synthetic plastic fibres and metal inserts
- Intended to worn only once and discarded, although sanitization procedures for multiple usages are currently in development
- Discouraged to be used by the general public to reserve supplies for healthcare workers

### **Medical/Surgical/Procedural Masks (Class I):**

- Looser in fit than respirators with a lesser degree of filtration
- Fastens to the face with straps, ties, or elastic ear loops

- Features pleats or folds for expansion to fit over the nose to chin
- Contains a bendable nose wire to create a seal and tighter fit
- Purposed for single-use and non-recyclable
- Will not maintain integrity if put through a laundry cycle
- Necessary in workplaces when determined by the employer

### **Eye Protection - goggles, safety glasses with side shields, or face shields (Class I):**

- Necessary when working within 2 metres of an unmasked person without a barrier (plexiglass, partition, wall), unless other controls can be implemented\*
- Can be cleaned, sanitized, and reused
- Must be worn with a face mask to be considered effective

***Not all devices are classified as PPE, but they are still important as measures to control/contain a virus***

### **Cloth Face Masks/Face Coverings/Non-Medical Masks (NMM):**

Although not deemed PPE, non-medical masks fulfill the current mandatory requirement to wear a face-covering in all indoor public settings.\*

- Considered the best low-waste, low-cost option
- Can be washed, dried, and reused
- May be custom-made or purchased in a variety of sizes, colours, and styles
- Will help to protect when worn snugly over the mouth and up to the bridge of the nose when no gaps are seen
- Most effective if made from three layers of tightly-woven fabric, i.e., cotton or linen, or two layers plus a pocket for a filter-type material
- Non-woven spunbond polypropylene fabric is washable and a popular choice for a filter, which uses the power of static electricity to trap particles, although the material will remain in the ecosystem for hundreds of years and releases toxic chemicals as it decomposes
- Disposable filters can be made from a folded paper kitchen towel or a rinsed, dried, and folded baby wipe

\*To check your municipality's up-to-date requirements and find your local public health unit, click here: [Public Health Unit Locator](#).

## **Barriers/Wall Dividers - partitions, clear guards, and shields made from acrylic or plexiglass:**

As an engineering control, employers can install barriers to help protect workers when physical distancing can be a challenge. For maximum safety against airborne viruses, the barriers should minimize airflow around the edges and protect the breathing zones from both sides.

## **Taking Care of Your Mask:**

Medical-grade masks are intended to be worn only once. To conserve resources, some people opt to reuse their disposable masks. If this applies to you, it is recommended that you replace your mask after it becomes damp, dirty, damaged, or if you have come into direct contact with someone who has an infectious disease.

To store a used face mask:

1. Fold them in half so that the outside is inward, which will prevent the contaminated surface from contacting anything during storage
2. Store in a clean resealable bag between uses throughout the day
3. Allow damp masks to dry in a paper bag, envelope, or other clean, breathable container and label per household member

To clean a cloth face mask:

1. Throw away any removable, non-reusable filter before machine washing or cleaning in the sink with hot, soapy water
2. Dry thoroughly before wearing it again since the damp cloth is less effective and makes breathing more difficult
3. Store dry masks in a clean resealable bag to prevent exposure to bacteria and germs

### ***Appropriate use of PPE significantly reduces the risk of infection***

The items we use are effective only when worn appropriately. It is good to keep in mind the following points:

- Train all employees who are required to wear PPE on proper donning and doffing
- Ensure all equipment to be worn is fitted well, and comfortable
- Guard yourself against self-contamination by making sure that the devices worn are simple to remove
- Wash or sanitize your hands before putting on an item and immediately after taking off your device(s)



- Handle your mask by its ties or elastic loops, and do not touch the front
- Regularly clean reusable masks and allow them to dry completely
- Replace all masks and PPE once they become damp, soiled, or damaged
- Discard any mask once it loses its original shape and no longer fits snugly or fails to cover the area from your nose to chin
- Do not let your mask rest under your chin, dangle from your ear, or sit on your forehead (the germs on the outside of the fabric may end up on your lips)
- If disposable gloves are worn:
  - Take care not to tear or puncture
  - Refrain from touching your face, phone, or other personal items
  - Do not share, wash, or disinfect (cleaning may lead to rips and tears deeming the gloves ineffective)
  - Remove by grasping the edge at the wrist, roll down, and turn inside out
  - Use once, dispose immediately into a lined receptacle, and clean your hands

### **Take Note:**

- Gloves made from cloth or other porous fabric are not protective and will not prevent the spread of the virus
- Masks with exhalation valves should not be worn as they emit respiratory droplets
- Filter inserts made from polypropylene can be washed with the mask, but should not be tumble-dried nor ironed, because the material is plastic and can melt
- Bandanas and neck gaiters may not be sufficient to stop the spread of airborne infection, if not multi-layered and made with a tightly woven fabric
- Masks should not be worn by children under 2 years of age or by those who are unable to remove a mask on their own or have been exempt due to medical, cognitive, or other issues
- Disposable masks will become damaged and ineffective if attempted to be cleaned in a typical laundry cycle
- Skin irritation and inhalation risks are possible if any mask is soaked or sprayed with harsh chemicals in an attempt to disinfect
- Damp fabric is a welcoming environment for mold to grow, so do not keep moist masks in a plastic bag or container
- Consider yourself a potential hazard to those around you and wear the appropriate PPE or face covering when in proximity to others
- Do not block your ability to see the road by hanging a mask from the rearview mirror of your vehicle. Not only is it unsanitary, but it is also an offence under the Highway Traffic Act to drive with an obstructed view

## Control and Prevention Measures

It is important to recognize that the devices we use will not eliminate the hazard of infectious disease. The best way to protect ourselves and others from possible exposure is by consistently applying measures that control and prevent the spread:

- Work at home whenever possible
- Rotate or stagger shifts to limit the number of people who share office space
- Consider placing learners in cohort groups when providing in-person instruction
- Have learners maintain the same workstation and supplies
- Maintain a physical distance of at least 2 meters (two arms lengths) from others outside of your household
- Avoid touching the outside of your mask and your face, particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth, with unwashed or unsanitized hands
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm
- Dispose of used tissues in a lined garbage container and then wash or sanitize your hands
- Create checklists to ensure staff maintain frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, particularly phones, door handles, light switches, electronics, and restrooms
- Avoid high-touch areas, including handrails and doorknobs, and consider touchless payment methods
- Place signs outside of your office to remind people not to enter if they are feeling unwell – and stay home when you are ill
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after being in public places, and especially:
  - After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose
  - After using the toilet or changing a diaper
  - After caring for someone sick
  - Before and after handling your mask
  - Before eating or preparing food
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains between 60-90% alcohol, if you are unable to wash your hands with soap and water (cover your hands entirely with the sanitizer and rub together until they feel dry)

## Resources:

[COVID-19 response framework: keeping Ontario safe and open](#)

[COVID-19 response framework: keeping Ontario safe and open](#)

[COVID-19 safety checklist for workplaces](#)

[Government of Ontario: Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#)

[Ontario's Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Standard Operating Procedures - Disinfection of Touchpoints](#)

[COVID-19 Business Support Grants](#)

[Government of Canada instructions on how to make your own non-medical mask](#)

[National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health: Physical barriers for](#)

[COVID-19 infection prevention and control in commercial settings](#)  
[Equipment Obstructing View: Signs, Objects, Etc. Sect 73](#)



## Mental Health

The pandemic has taken an emotional toll on the management and staff of LBS agencies and other nonprofit organizations across Ontario. There is a consensus that staff members are exhausted, with some experiencing burnout. Management needs to assume the responsibility of fostering mental wellness within their organizations.

Key Stressors of Staff:

- Assuming numerous roles due to lack of volunteers
- Fear of contracting the virus and passing it on to vulnerable family members
- Establishing a work/life balance while working from home
- Isolation from family, friends, and work colleagues
- Finding funding to provide remote services for clients and learners
- Job/financial insecurity

Removing the stigma surrounding mental wellness is essential as we navigate this uncertain time and enter a post-pandemic world.

### **Fostering a Supportive Workplace While Staying on Top of Work Goals**

It is noteworthy to mention that the very leaders who take the majority of responsibility in ensuring mental wellness among their staff may struggle in balancing an accommodative and compassionate work culture with one that also maintains productivity. Leaders must be mindful of the methods they use to promote a nurturing environment without drifting away from performance expectations, especially where employees work remotely. They must also be mindful of the workload they assign to employees as too much can be burdensome; this will only be counterproductive to organizational growth. A few tips for nonprofit leaders in keeping up with work goals while also prioritizing mental wellness are:

- Eliminating or preventing the occurrence of psychological hazards that keep the work environment conducive to good mental health
- Emphasizing the importance of work-life balance to employees to make sure they are not over or under-working themselves
- Reminding everyone to be open and to communicate when necessary about how they are feeling and about any mental health concerns they may have
- Acting as a team player, mentor, and inspirer who recognizes their employees' efforts
- Establishing meaningful connections and trust with employees so they feel comfortable disclosing difficulties they may be facing

- Having a succession policy and plan prepared for when employees take a leave
- Being clear on instructions and giving all required resources to employees to successfully do their job
- Focusing your conversations with a struggling employee on performance obstacles and not private and personal matters, which may violate human rights of privacy
- Avoiding unrealistic expectations from employees by keeping goals attainable

## The Transition To-and-From Working Remotely

The uncertainties and unforeseen risks that the COVID-19 virus brought in the past year introduced a significant challenge for staff and employers alike. New COVID-19 workplace protocols instituted requirements of reducing the number of people present in the workplace or even shutting down the office altogether. The sudden nature of changes to the workplace environment, none of which most staff had time to brace themselves for, led to a negative impact on mental health and overall wellbeing for many.

### Adjusting to the Remote Work Environment

As you may know, to keep employees safe and healthy, many organizations planned to have many, or all, of their employees work from their homes. Meetings, service delivery, and any other work operations—which would otherwise be face-to-face—were done virtually through a home setting. For many employers and employees, working at home gave rise to negative impacts on their mental health and overall wellbeing.

A few ways that remote work is taking a heavy toll on mental health are through:

- Feelings of isolation and loneliness as the distance from other colleagues has led individuals to experience less powerful interpersonal connections.
- The lack of a divide between work life and personal life, which:
  - May disrupt established home routines and healthful daily habits conducive to psychological wellness.
  - Can lead to telecommuting fatigue and burnout.
  - Can affect quality time spent with loved ones.
- Confusions brought on by the sudden and drastic change in the work environment can lead to distraction and reduced productivity and reinforce the cycle of stress and anxiety.
- Sub-optimal work conditions in the home setting for workers who need specific accommodations to perform their job duties without hardship.

Tips for staff to keep mental health and wellbeing intact while working from home are:

- Regularly scheduling check-ins and meetings with one another for support and updates.
- Separating the home office from the rest of the home environment by:
  - Wearing different clothes while working.
  - Setting a designated time for work, breaks, and time off
- Distributing many spirit-boosting social breaks inside and between meetings to stay revitalized.
- Making sure staff of all levels of ability have the resources they require to excel in their work.

## **Transitioning Back to the Workplace**

The shift back to the workplace setting after adapting to working remotely is equally as challenging. During periods with lower COVID-19 case counts, the Canadian government loosens indoor restrictions and allows offices to reopen and/or welcome more staff back into the workplace. However, returning to the workplace can create new concerns and put workers of LBS and other nonprofits at risk of psychological distress.

Several ways in which the transition back to work may affect staff mental health are:

- Feeling burdensome for expressing a need for accommodation or an inability to return to work during what may be a difficult time for small nonprofits operating with fewer staff available.
- Holding constant fears or feelings of paranoia of contracting the virus because of the lessened sense of control and uncertainties outside the home.
- Being overwhelmed by what may feel like endless new protocols to which staff must adhere.
- Having pre-existing mental health symptoms or conditions that can be exacerbated by the pandemic-related changes in the workplace environment.

Advice for employers/employees dealing with these pressing concerns are:

- Being emotionally present as an employer to help the staff feel comfortable speaking up about their concerns and making them aware of community mental health resources.
- Ensuring that all staff is informed about the varying degrees of physical and mental ability among employees. It will prevent conflict over who is granted an exemption from being in the office.
- Standing by an employee's right to privacy about personal matters and not crossing these boundaries as an employer.
- Building a web of upbeat, caring, well-informed, and reliable staff through regular, thorough information sessions and reminders on work etiquette and protocols.
- Providing all necessary tools for employees to work safely and competently.

## Key Stressors for Learners and Clients

Clients and learners, particularly those who exhibit lower literacy levels, have also demonstrated higher stress levels and anxiety throughout the pandemic. Some significant contributors to elevated stress and anxiety are:

- Lack of job security
- Fear of contracting the disease and spreading it to loved ones
- Financial responsibilities (bills, rent, groceries, etc.)
- Government-assisted funding running out
- Isolation
- Caring for children and/or elderly parents
- Addiction

LBS and other nonprofit programs are vital to the well-being of vulnerable populations, as they often provide one of the few means of opportunity for wellness check-ins. It is necessary to consider that these individuals may not have access to technology; however, most have access to mobile phones allowing access to the recommended resources and supports.

Consideration must also be given to the barriers vulnerable populations face accessing mental wellness resources, such as transportation, stigma, and judgment. By providing information about mental health resources, management and staff can offer empowerment to at-risk populations.

## Supporting Mental Wellness of Learners/Clients

A few suggested links for staff of LBS and other nonprofits to access are provided below:

- [Mental Health in Canada: COVID and Beyond](#) is a policy advice document by the Canadian Association of Mental Health (CAMH) providing insight into the effects of COVID-19 on the mental wellness of vulnerable populations.
- [Wellness Together Canada](#) offers virtual resources, assessment, and counselling to support the mental health of Canadians.
- [BounceBack Ontario](#) is a program that offers skill-building to individuals with mild depression.
- [MindBeacon](#) provides free online cognitive behaviour therapy work modules for personal use.

## Reach Out For Mental Health Campaign

The pandemic has affected all communities and a range of populations. It has left many people feeling anxious and depressed. In September 2020, Community Literacy Ontario, Literacy Link South Central, Literacy Northwest, and Quality in Lifelong Learning Network partnered to develop an initiative called

*Reach Out For Mental Health*. This 21-day virtual campaign invited organizations to contribute resources and support via social media for those in the community struggling with, or trying to maintain, their mental health during this time of crisis.

Please [click here](#) to view all downloadable resources and background information about the campaign.

## **Northern Rural and Remote Communities of Ontario**

According to a Canadian Community Health Survey, individuals who reside in Northern Ontario's rural and remote towns have a shorter life expectancy and higher rates of mental health issues than Canadians living in more populated urban regions of Ontario. Mental health services in northern and rural communities in Ontario are not as well-established or easy to access as mental health services in Southern Ontario, making them under-serviced communities.

### **Issues Affecting Mental Health Care of Rural and Northern Ontario Communities:**

- The sparsity of mental health professionals in these locations because of high travel times, lower salaries, and significant distance from other health or academic institutions where they work
- Very long travel times or high travel costs required to reach a hospital or psychiatric and mental health care centres which specialize in complex mental illnesses
- The cost of performing outreach and accommodating for client access to mental health care, as well as efforts to retain mental health workers in northern and rural areas, can take away from funding for comprehensive mental health plans
- A lack of public transit systems as an affordable means of commuting to needed centres
- Poor communication infrastructure

### **Mental Health Resources for LBS/Nonprofit Staff and Learners/Clients:**

#### [ConnexOntario](#)

ConnexOntario is one of the largest mental health and addiction services directories in the province. Using a client-centred, compassionate approach, they point people from all corners of Ontario to programs, services, and resources based on their backgrounds and needs. They also provide service information via phone and webchat for people struggling with drugs, alcohol, gambling, and mental health issues.

#### [The Northern Psychiatric Outreach Program at CAMH \(NPOP-C\)](#)

The Northern Psychiatry Outreach Program is an elaborate plan which aims to compensate for the lack of available health resources. The University of Toronto has joined forces with the Centre for Addiction



and Mental Health (CAMH) to help under-serviced Canadians residing in northern and rural areas of Ontario receive the clinical care they need through qualified mental health professionals. Of notable mention as part of this initiative is their pioneering effort to educate and promote the importance of health.

#### [Evidence Exchange Network for Mental Health and Addictions](#)

This resource provides examples of how mental health and addiction service providers in Northern Ontario restructured their services during the pandemic.

#### [North Bay Regional Health Centre - Mental Health Programs & Services](#)

An overview of mental health programs and services at the North Bay Regional Health Centre.

### **Ontario.ca - The Government of Ontario**

1. [Find mental health and addiction services in your community](#)
2. [Get medical advice: Telehealth Ontario](#)

### **Mental Health Commission of Canada's E-mental health**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) original and innovative E-mental health initiative aims to simplify the process of acquiring access to mental health services and eliminate commonly reported barriers that impede effective online mental health care. MHCC acknowledges that rural and remote communities in Ontario all display varying needs because of their unique cultural, socioeconomic, governmental, and community characteristics. They recognize the importance of evolving research, re-evaluation, and monitoring of outcomes of currently implemented practices as they pertain to differing populations. A few relevant, evidence-informed resources you can access are:

1. **Toolkit for E-Mental Health Implementation** - Contains descriptive resources which help to build practical knowledge on delivering mental health services online. These can be effective tools for upgrading current online/other digital delivery methods and can be utilized by individuals working within the mental health realm of your nonprofit.
  - a) Main manual:  
[Toolkit for e-Mental Health Implementation | MHCC](#)
  - b) Webinar:  
[Implementing Digital Innovations for Success: Examples of Knowledge Translation Tools in the Field of e-Mental Health | MHCC](#)
  - c) Case scenario booklet:  
[E-Mental Health Case Scenarios & FAQs: Building Capacity for Digital Health Services | MHCC](#)

2. **Mental Health, Technology and You** - This guide highlights a wide selection of technologies and online platforms to choose from based on your or your client's personal needs. It also incorporates a spectrum of lived experiences of people with different mental health issues to take you through examples of these resources being used.
  - a) Main booklet:  
[Mental Health, Technology and You | MHCC](#)
3. **Mental Health Apps: How to Make an Informed Choice** - A framework which, as the MHCC puts it, is "designed to help service providers and people seeking care navigate the challenges of choosing the best apps."
  - a) The framework:  
[Mental Health Apps: How to Make an Informed Choice | MHCC](#)
4. **Stepped Care 2.0 E-Mental Health Demonstration Project** - A project created in collaboration with the MHCC and the Newfoundland and Labrador government and Memorial University which empowers clients to be actively involved in their treatment to immediately figure out the individualized mental health services they need, with the least resources and wait times required. This project shows promise in rural and remote locations across Canadian provinces.
  - a) Full report:  
[Newfoundland and Labrador Stepped Care 2.0 Demonstration Project - Final Report | MHCC](#)
  - b) Summarized version of report:  
[Clients and providers get behind Stepped Care 2.0 | MHCC](#)
  - c) Webinar:  
[Webinar Recording & Interactive Powerpoint: Stepped Care 2.0 with founder Dr. Peter Cornish | EENet](#)



## Clients' Basic Needs

It has become extraordinarily difficult for individuals with low income to meet their basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many existing and potential clients may not be accessing LBS services because taking care of their basic needs comes first.

Some of the biggest concerns people have faced since the onset of the pandemic involve income insecurity, loneliness, precarious employment, unstable or no housing, lack of accessibility to healthy food, lack of warm clothing, and fear and risk of contracting the virus. Considering this, it is important to ask clients if their basic needs are being met; never assume they are. They may not know what they need or how you can help. Provide support and relevant local referrals wherever possible, and follow up.



### Best Practices:

- Communicate pandemic information to clients in plain language; a template for communicating using plain language is provided in section 5 of the [appendix](#)
- Connect clients to check in with each other; this can create a social connection and a sense of responsibility
- Refer clients to local caremongering Facebook groups; communities are stepping up for each other during this time of crisis and many are willing to help others meet their basic needs, e.g., delivering groceries, gifting essential supplies, etc.
  - Tip: search “caremongering” followed by your town’s name on Facebook
- Literacy networks might consider sending out relevant information to partners about housing and food security in their region
- Offer wraparound support referrals during intake
- If you can, organize food, winter clothing, and/or technology drives so you can provide these items to clients who need them
- If you can, provide PPE and other safety items to clients
- If clients are not currently accessing your services, consider calling to check in anyway (if they are open to this) – they may not have a support system in place
- Reopen for in-person services if/when you can; in-person support can be extremely valuable for vulnerable populations

## Resources:

[The Health Line](#) is an Ontario-wide health and community service directory.



Need help? Call, email, or [live chat](#) with 211. [211](#) provides free and confidential information and referrals for community, social, government, and health services.

[Social Assistance in Ontario: Links to Helpful Resources](#) – Provided by the Government of Ontario.

A comprehensive list of [Tax Credits and Benefits for People](#) – Provided by the Government of Ontario.

[Ontario Electricity Support Program](#) – A program that provides a monthly credit to the electricity bills of qualified individuals/households with low income.

thehealthline.ca FRANÇAIS

Find local health and community services across Ontario:

1. [Erie St. Clair](#)
2. [South West](#)
3. [Waterloo Wellington](#)
4. [Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant](#)
5. [Central West](#)
6. [Mississauga Halton](#)
7. [Toronto Central](#)
8. [Central](#)
9. [Central East](#)
10. [South East](#)
11. [Champlain](#)
12. [North Simcoe Muskoka](#)
13. [North East](#)
14. [North West](#)

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**Social Assistance** ▼

- ▶ About the Ontario Disability Support Program
- ▶ About Ontario Works
- ▶ Apply Online
- ▶ Frequently asked questions
- ▶ Forms
- ▶ Links to helpful resources
- ▶ Social assistance policy directives
- ▶ Publications

### Social assistance in Ontario: Links to helpful resources

<b>Canada</b>	Connects you to a range of federal benefits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employment Insurance (EI)</li><li>• Education and Training</li><li>• Housing</li><li>• Health</li><li>• Business</li></ul>
<b>Canada Benefits</b>	
<b>Health Canada</b>	Health Canada helps you maintain and improve your health, while respecting your individual choices and circumstances.

## Transportation

Safe transportation is a barrier for many people during a pandemic. Some feel unsafe using public transportation, taxis, and/or rideshares during a pandemic, while others have no concerns. For those who are hesitant, it may ease their concerns if they are told about the safety measures in place in your region. If clients are using these transportation methods to access your services, consider reminding them of the following:

- Do not use public transit if feeling unwell
- Wear a mask
- Use contactless payment if possible
- Maintain physical distancing
- When possible, travel during non-peak hours to avoid close contact with others
- Practise respiratory etiquette
- Avoid touching their face
- Avoid touching shared surfaces as much as possible
- Carry and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wipes
- Wash their hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer after their journey



If clients are uncomfortable travelling by way of public transportation, there are some other ways to stay in contact, including virtual learning, emails, phone calls, text messaging, curbside pick-up/drop-off of materials, and mailing materials back and forth using prepaid self-addressed envelopes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many LBS organizations redirected their client support dollars to cover technology and virtual delivery costs for learners.



[Steve Morgan, Masks Required notice on destination sign of a TriMet bus during Covid-19 pandemic, Sep 2020, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

# Technology and Stable Internet

During a pandemic or other emergency protocol, our means of communication and service delivery are limited for safety purposes. A shift to digital operations may be unavoidable. With many day-to-day needs now addressed online, access to technology and stable internet are important requirements for any individual.

When it comes to clients, there are a few factors to consider when planning for moving forward. Awareness of your service continuation through advertisement can play an important role in staying connected with clients. Having your resources available through multiple formats can be convenient for clients and staff alike, as not all clients/staff have the same level of digital literacy skills. This means some individuals may be programmers while others have never created an email address. Depending on the demographics and geographics of your client base, internet and device access may be more of an issue when staying in contact with clients.

## Reliable Devices and Internet Connectivity

For a comprehensive list of what people need to learn online, check out [AlphaPlus's guide to getting ready for remote learning](#).

### Device Requirements for Online Learning

For learners to successfully participate in learning and correspond with LBS centers, they must have a capable device. Smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktops can all classify as capable devices. Outdated devices (those no longer receiving software updates) may not support required applications, could take much longer to access files and programs, or may not have required hardware features. As reliable as a Nokia flip phone may be, it cannot allow learners to access the full range of needed features.

#### Required hardware includes:

- A webcam
- A microphone
- A keyboard or keypad
- A mouse or touchpad
- WiFi/data capabilities

#### For a desktop computer, clients will also require:

- A WiFi adapter



- A router and modem (internet connectivity)
- An ethernet cable for a wired internet connection (CAT9)

## Communication

### Software

Informing staff about workplace procedure updates will help to ensure a productive workflow with no interruptions to the daily workload. Some organizations reported using [Slack](#) to communicate with staff, which offers [free or discounted plan upgrades for nonprofits](#).

Communicating service updates with clients will present a few roadblocks to clear before things can run smoothly. If your contact information is not up-to-date, and your primary means of contact is unsuccessful, below are some reported suggestions.

- Phone calls
- Text messages
- Email
- Postal service to a residential address
- Update your website, blog, and social media
- Physical signage in the workplace visible to the public

To maintain contact once you have reached out successfully, it will typically depend on the client's access to technology and preferred contact method. A comprehensive contact list of your clients should be stored online for reliable communications by phone/text, email, and mail.

In most cases, video conferencing is preferred by clients with access to technology and the necessary digital literacy skills. Video calls can give clients a sense of being in the same room with staff members, which can also help when establishing a better staff-client relationship.

Of course, we cannot forget the importance of having an email account for regular communication and software account creation. This is necessary to receive alerts and software-related emails from the program developers.



### Popular video conferencing and virtual learning platforms:

- Zoom
- GoToMeeting

- Microsoft Teams
- Google Meet
- Google Classroom
- Blackboard Collaborate
- D2L - Brightspace
- Moodle
- LearnCube

Many virtual learning platforms have a free basic package; however, upgrades are required depending on a variety of factors such as the number of participants and complexity of the delivery. Depending on the number of learners, virtual learning platforms can be quite expensive, so organizations need to plan accordingly. Many organizations reported that the move to digital programming is a cost-effective option for service delivery and it allows for a greater number of learners in isolated areas to access services.

Professional development opportunities are necessary for LBS facilitators shifting to virtual delivery. Providing opportunities and platforms for facilitators to share ideas, resources, and best practices will be beneficial.

### **Advertising Availability of Digital Resources for Learners**

The awareness of in-person services shifting to take place online is an important consideration to make. If your clients are not aware of online services during a lockdown situation, they cannot participate. Staying in contact with clients will help to avoid interruptions or delays in completing a service. Besides the previously mentioned methods of contact, some organizations used platforms like [WhatsApp](#) and [TextNow](#) to stay in contact with learners. It is important to note that these apps require an active connection to WiFi or a data plan to send and receive messages, calls, and files. Long-distance charges may apply to the recipient of phone calls depending on the location of the phone number selected.



Social media can be another way of informing and contacting your clients. Although it is useful to have a following already in place to reach your clients quickly, the ability to reach large audiences with a single post can be beneficial for keeping people informed. A few popular social media platforms which allow photo and text posting, video/link sharing, and inbox messenger features are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Once learners are aware of your services offered digitally, you must be able to share and receive files in a digital format. A significant obstacle faced by most organizations is a lack of digital learning materials.



Scanned physical copies of books and learning materials (depending on copyright permissions), slideshow presentations for meetings, and/or other documents created for sharing must be posted publicly and/or attached to emails in most cases. Your clients must be made aware of any downloads or files they will need to seek out and use during their interactions with you. Software capable of viewing a text-based document is needed for viewing downloaded files. Some files will require software like Adobe Acrobat (.pdf viewer) to read and modify the document.

For physical materials specific to learner courses, you may be required to provide copies in-person using contactless pick-up or drop-off. Not all learners possess the same level of digital literacy, and their needs will have to be considered for continued service delivery.

- Curbside pick-up/drop-off of learning materials can help to ensure that these clients are not forced to stop participating
- Mailing learning materials to clients is an option if pick-up/drop-off is not possible

## Potential Obstacles

### Shared Devices and Learning Times, Bandwidth Limitations

Having a stable internet connection is also vital for clients, learners, and staff members. An unreliable internet connection can lead to:

- Interrupted and dropped calls
- Corrupted file uploads/downloads
- Increased upload/download times

Most internet packages offered by internet service providers have bandwidth and connected device limits. This means individuals accessing the internet have a set upload/download rate at which they can access files and connect to video calls.

Recommended upload and download rates will vary based on the needs and size of each household, but a good rate to aim for when selecting an internet package would be:

- Upload speed of 10 Mbps
- Download speed of 100 Mbps

Client/staff member's internet connections can be negatively affected by the number of devices connected to the same WiFi, especially if others in a household/workplace are using a large amount of bandwidth, e.g., gaming, streaming videos, downloading files, etc. Even if a connected device is not in use, it will take up one of the device limit slots set by the internet provider. Upgrading your internet

package will allow for more devices to be connected to the same router and better upload/download speeds.

If you are experiencing a poor connection, be sure to:

- Disconnect devices not in use
- Arrange a schedule for dedicated learning/work times with others sharing your internet
- Turn off your video (if in a video call)

*Note: a wired internet connection will always be more reliable and secure than a WiFi connection.*

Depending on available community resources, individuals may have access to free WiFi from public libraries, community centres, and restaurants (provided safety protocols allow for in-house access). It is important to note certain restaurants will require a purchase and/or agreement to terms of use for individuals to remain connected to free WiFi (loitering laws).

## **Digital Literacy Skills**

Not all individuals hoping to continue education/work on a digital platform have the same digital literacy skills. Increased demand for remote learning and working has brought forward a requirement for individuals to know how to navigate devices and software. This has created an obstacle for individuals without basic digital literacy skills, as the most available way to learn digital literacy skills is online. This can discourage individuals and cause them to opt out of continuing education or working from home.



Alternative options for learning digital skills online:

- Physical copies of books from libraries
- Learning from friends and family with higher digital literacy skills
- In-person digital literacy skill groups (safety protocols permitting)
- Blended learning (combining in-person and technology-based learning)

Easy-to-access sources found online could also include:

- YouTube video tutorials
- Google searches for basic device/software navigation
- [AlphaPlus](#)

## Supplying Devices and Internet Access

Providing reliable devices and basic internet packages so that clients in need can learn from home can become very costly. Nonprofits should consider the possibility of these expenses when planning for online service delivery.

Internet services are not always cost-effective, but some service providers may offer deals for large requirements. Based on the client's location and situation, data packages may be required to participate in online learning. The cost of data plans are typically much greater than WiFi. However, data plans can be used almost anywhere, not just within range of a WiFi router.

Libraries, nonprofit organizations, and charities may wish to look into an organization called [TechSoup Canada](#). They are a nonprofit dedicated to helping other nonprofits source donated and discounted technology and software, and they also provide some great learning resources. Another resource for organizations and learners is [Renewed Computer Technology \(RCT\)](#). They are a nonprofit specializing in refurbished communications technology.

## Setting Up a Home Office Space

The importance of a proper home office space should not be overlooked. A dedicated work area free of distractions with ample space for your device(s), paperwork, seating, etc. is an ideal setup for working remotely. Good quality seating is a very important piece of office equipment to have when working remotely. Using inadequate seating may affect your posture, which, in turn, may cause further health issues. Headaches/migraines, physical pain, restlessness, and demotivation are just a few health issues which may be experienced.

Workplace Safety and Prevention Services has a great resource page called [Working From a Remote Office](#). This page provides helpful resources for employers regarding remote office ergonomics, mental health, health and safety, and more.

Additionally, the following link is a brief YouTube video from the Wall Street Journal explaining good ergonomic setup for your workspace: [Ergonomics Expert Explains How to Set Up Your Desk](#)

## Fundraising During a Pandemic

Fundraising has become a difficult task for community-based nonprofits throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, most fundraising took place through in-person community events – events which have become much more difficult/impossible to run because of pandemic restrictions. Many nonprofits have been relying on COVID-19 related grants instead. However, it will be important to adopt more virtual fundraising initiatives to sustain funding in the years to come.

### Recommended starting points for virtual fundraising include:

- Increasing your organization’s social media presence
- Improving your organization’s website and donation process
- Shifting regular fundraising initiatives to take place virtually
- Launching creative, new virtual fundraising initiatives

## Social Media and Communication

Social media marketing is a very important tool. Reaching out to your community through personalized, meaningful posts is a great way to generate awareness and donations. Many of the nonprofits we interviewed in preparation for this document attributed any fundraising success during the COVID-19 pandemic to sharing their needs and donation links over social media. Paid social media ads can be an effective way to reach more clients and supporters in your community. [Canva](#) is an easy (and free) tool for quickly designing professional-looking social media posts and other marketing materials.

If you do not feel it is the right time to fundraise with all that is going on, it is important to continue regular communication with supporters. Let them know how your organization is coping and adjusting services throughout the pandemic. This could even encourage donations. Whether you are actively seeking donations or not, social media and email newsletters are both effective ways to stay connected with supporters during times of crisis.



## Tips to Optimize Your Website for Donations

- Add an eye-catching donation button to the top of every page
- Ensure your website and donation process are mobile friendly. Donations are increasingly occurring via mobile phones (you can use [Google's Mobile-Friendly Test](#) for free)
- Keep it simple; limiting distractions on your website and required fields to fill out on donation forms will increase the likeliness of users remaining on the page and/or completing donations
- It is best if donors do not have to leave your website or navigate through several pages to donate
  - Some donation platforms have options for embedding branded, personalized donation forms directly to your website
- It can be beneficial to include how donations will be used
- Include a prominent option to subscribe to your newsletter
- Check out PayPal's article on [How to Increase Donations](#)

## Popular Donation and Fundraising Platforms

Each platform listed below provides charitable tax receipts to donors, and the first three provide donation button HTML codes for your website.

### [CanadaHelps](#) (fee-based)

- Customizable donation forms that can be embedded into your website
- Peer-to-peer (P2P) fundraising campaigns, Fundraise Now button option for your website
- Fundraising campaigns
- Ticketed events and event management
- Donor management and reporting
- See their [Charity Account Training Videos](#) for help
- Check out their webinar [Fundraising in 2021: The Tools You Need to Master](#) for detailed information about the features and general tips
- Join their Facebook group [Canadian Charities Connect](#) to discuss new opportunities and challenges within the charitable sector with other nonprofit leaders

### [GoFundMe](#) (fee-based)

- Currently has similar features to CanadaHelps

### [PayPal Giving Fund](#) (no fees)

- Strictly a donation platform
- Payments for some other donation platforms are processed through PayPal Giving Fund, so it is worthwhile to enroll your charity if you have not already

### [Facebook's Charitable Giving Tools](#) (no fees)

- Signing up enables your organization to:
  - Include a donate button on your Facebook Page, story posts, and live videos
  - Hold fundraisers and allow supporters to hold fundraisers for you on their pages; both with visual fundraising goals
- Once your Facebook page is verified as a nonprofit, most of these features will also [be available through Instagram](#) if:
  - Your organization's Instagram account is switched to a professional/business account
  - The accounts are linked

## Virtual Fundraising

Live video events can be hosted through whichever platform you are most comfortable with (Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, Twitch, etc.). Platforms that have a screen sharing feature can allow for a mix of pre-recorded and live content. To raise funds you could:

- Sell tickets through a platform like [Eventbrite](#) or [CanadaHelps](#)
- Require a donation to receive an invite link and/or password
- Offer the event free of charge, soliciting for donations during the event
- Host the event as a paid [Facebook Page Event](#) or [Zoom Webinar](#)

To be set up for success, promote your event heavily and run practice events with your team before hosting it. Check out Zoom's blog post [Best Practices for Hosting a Digital Event](#). Of course, not all virtual events would require a video component.

### **Some virtual event ideas could include:**

- Performances (musicians, poets, comedians, talent shows, etc.)
- Galas, awards, parties
- Conferences, webinars
- Competitions (virtually connected runs, walks, challenges, "thons", etc.)
- Classes (cooking, art, workouts, etc.)
- Games nights

- Contests, raffles
- Silent auctions (there are many online platforms available, such as [32auctions](#))

## **No Gala Gala**

An innovative idea used by many organizations during the pandemic in place of long-standing annual fundraising events is the No Gala Gala. Explain that while you cannot do (*annual event*) this year, your organization is still in need, and usually relies on it for (*\$ or % amount*) of annual funding. You could offer a virtual form of the event, or just ask supporters to consider donating the regular ticket cost if they are in a position to do so. Be sure to communicate that tax receipts are available for the full donation.

## **Peer-to-Peer Fundraising (P2P)**

P2P fundraising empowers existing supporters to fundraise and spread awareness within their networks on your behalf. Optimize P2P fundraisers through creating challenges, especially ones that foster friendly competition. Try to create the same sense of community rallying that can be achieved through in-person events by regular communication and social media posts – using hashtags, participant/team spotlights, deadlines, progress visuals, etc. to keep people motivated and encourage more donations.

## **Supply Drives**

You could organize a supply drive, letting people know what items are needed through your website, social media, and email. Arrange for contactless curbside pick-up or drop-off of donated supplies with safety precautions in place. Alternatively, set up an Amazon Wishlist and share it with your supporters. This way, people can purchase items your organization has specified are needed and have them shipped directly to your office without leaving home.

## **In-Person Open-Air Fundraisers**

When the spread of the virus is more controlled and it is safe to do so, open-air fundraisers with all safety precautions in place may be a good option. You could require registration and a digital pre-screening form submission for contact tracing. Some options could include socially distant concerts, performances, movie nights, yoga classes, etc.

*Many of the online platforms mentioned in this section take a small percentage of donations (usually under 5% and sometimes with an option to pass this fee to donors) and/or may require a subscription fee. See each platform's pricing pages for more information. Evidently, media and technology are constantly evolving – this information is up to date as of April 2021.*

# Appendix

1. [Pandemic Plan](#)
2. [Assessing Closing and Reopening an Office](#)
3. [Vaccination Policy](#)
4. [Additional Resources](#)
5. [Plain Language Checklist](#)





# Pandemic Plan

The goals of \_\_\_\_\_'s Pandemic Plan are to protect the health and safety of staff, volunteers and project participants to minimize the disruption to business activities in the event of a pandemic.

## Preventative

\_\_\_\_\_ supports the actions recommended below by the Public Health Agency of Canada in its "Flu prevention checklist".

- **Wash your hands frequently.** Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least twenty (20) seconds to help remove bacteria and viruses. Wash before and after eating, after you have been in a public place, after using the washroom, after coughing and sneezing and after touching surfaces that may have been contaminated. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also effective in killing viruses.
- **Keep your hands away from your face.** In most cases, the flu virus enters the body through the eyes, nose or mouth.
- **Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand.** If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands.
- **Get immunized.** \_\_\_\_\_ recommends that staff, volunteers and project participants get immunized.
- **Keep common surface areas clean and disinfected.** Doorknobs, light switches, telephones, keyboards and other surfaces can become contaminated with all kinds of bacteria and viruses. Regular cleaning and disinfecting of these surfaces with normal household disinfectants can help.
- **Stay healthy.** Eat healthy foods and stay physically active to keep your immune system strong.
- **If you get sick, stay home.** If you are not feeling well, you should stay home from school or work until your symptoms are gone. If your symptoms get worse, call your healthcare provider.

## Additional preventative measures are:

- \_\_\_\_\_ will provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer for staff to use. All staff, volunteers and project participants will be encouraged to regularly use sanitizer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ staff will regularly wipe down their keyboards and work surfaces with alcohol-based wipes or cleaning solutions.

## Operational

In the event of a declared pandemic, the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chair of the Board, is empowered to close the office or offsite location to protect the health and safety of staff.

- All staff, volunteers and project participants are encouraged to stay home in the case of illness to avoid the spread of a pandemic.
- In the case of a pandemic, \_\_\_\_\_ supports flexible work arrangements where staff, volunteers and project participants can work from home or work flexible hours.
- During a pandemic, \_\_\_\_\_ supports holding meetings online or via teleconference where possible to reduce the need for face-to-face meetings and resulting travel.
- All staff should ensure that computer and other passwords are shared amongst each other and with the board chair in a secure manner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ supports key operating documents being placed online on \_\_\_\_\_'s internal systems and a secure online file-sharing service to ensure that critical information can be accessed by staff or board members in the event that the office is closed for a long period of time due to a pandemic.
- Home and cell contact information should be shared amongst all staff and the board chair via the Succession Planning manual.

## Sick Time

- Refer to \_\_\_\_\_'s policies on sick leave. Should staff require additional days off due to the flu or other pandemics, the Executive Director (or the Board Chair in the case of the Executive Director) must be notified to discuss the situation and decide upon a remedy

## Assessing Closing and Reopening an Office

Please note: your office should follow all official guidelines in accordance with federal and provincial decisions as well as the guidelines of your municipal government and health unit.

It is important to consider the concerns of all employees, especially when working through a crisis or when returning to the office after a crisis. Some employees will have more anxieties than others. Some may be returning after experiencing extended hardship or loss. Everyone will experience a crisis differently and providing a safe and supportive environment will be key for the health of all employees.

As we also learned from our experience with COVID-19 closures, it may be necessary to close an office immediately without the chance to plan for the closure in advance. While such situations can be chaotic, we recommend following public health orders first and then assessing how to move forward once the office is closed.

If your workplace is given time to prepare for a closure, it will be important to consider the following:

- Can you contact all your employees quickly?
- If you provide services to the public, do you have a variety of methods for contacting clients quickly?
- Is there a crisis response plan for your office?
- Do employees have access to this plan?
- Can you provide updated crisis information to employees and clients as necessary?
- Do you have a list of key documents you need to keep the office operational remotely? Is the list stored in the cloud or other location accessible outside the office?
- Are the key documents accessible via the cloud or other location?
- Do your employees have specialized technology or equipment needs for their positions? Will these items be available to them remotely?
- Is there a plan for allowing employees to retrieve necessary items from the office once it is closed?
- Does your organization have established “work-from-home” guidelines to assist employees in transitioning to a remote work environment?

Assessing the return to work:

- Do you have an employee return-to-work protocol?
- Do you have a daily health screening questionnaire for employees and visitors to the space?
- Can your space accommodate employees safely?
- If social distancing is necessary, will this be possible?
- Are directional arrows necessary to guide foot traffic through the workspace?
- Do you have appropriate signs for doors and workspaces?
- Do you have access to appropriate cleaning supplies?
- Where are those cleaning supplies housed?
- Is there a designated person to distribute or order cleaning supplies?
- Will you be outsourcing any cleaning?
- Will there be designated “deep-cleaning” of the workspaces?
- Is the appropriate, alcohol-based hand sanitizer available to everyone in the space?
- Does your space need barriers to assist with distancing, such as plexiglass dividers?
- Are you able to provide the appropriate masks for employees or visitors who do not bring their own?
- Do you have safe ways to accommodate individuals who are not able to wear masks?
- Do you have protocol for if an employee or visitor becomes ill while in the workspace?
- Is there designated space for isolation of individuals in the workspace?
- Will employees require new or additional training to maintain a safe workspace?

## Suggested Resources:

### [Pandemic Planning: Reopening for Business](#)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety created the resource “Pandemic Planning: Reopening for Business.” This free e-course takes about 30 minutes to complete and offers key information about COVID-19 and creating a safe working environment. The course is intended for employers, supervisors, managers, and employees.

### [Post Pandemic Business Playbook](#)

Ontario’s Workplace Safety and Prevention Services created a “Post-Pandemic Business Playbook” which has detailed information about preparing workspaces for re-opening under COVID-19.

### [Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning \(HVAC\) Systems in Buildings and COVID-19](#)

Public Health Ontario created this resource to provide education around the connection between COVID-19 transmission and airflow in enclosed spaces. Although much of this research is new and there is still more to learn about airflow and disease transmission, this resource can be helpful for assessing the needs of your workspace.

# COVID-19 Vaccination Policy

Effective Date: \_\_\_\_\_, 202\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is implementing a voluntary COVID-19 vaccination policy. This policy is subject to change as circumstances develop.

## Vaccination:

When the COVID-19 vaccines become available, \_\_\_\_\_ strongly encourages all staff, volunteers and project participants to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. If required, we will provide paid time off to Staff and Project Participants in the form of lieu time to obtain the COVID-19 vaccination. We require proof of vaccination be provided and a copy will be stored in the secure and private personnel file. All new Staff, Volunteers and Project Participants will be requested to provide proof of vaccination prior to engagement.

\_\_\_\_\_ encourages everyone to check with their local Public Health Unit to determine when a vaccine will become available.

## Accommodation:

Should staff, volunteers or project participants decline the COVID-19 vaccination, once available to them, for reasons related to disability, creed or any other grounds protected by the Human Rights Code, \_\_\_\_\_ requests in writing that the person declining the COVID-19 vaccine did so based on a ground protected by the Human Rights Code. We reserve the right to ask for information to substantiate the grounds, further to regular workplace accommodation processes.

Where an employee, volunteer or project participant chooses not to be vaccinated, an assessment of the nature of work they perform and the risk to the work environment will be conducted. In each case, an assessment will consider:

- enhanced Personal Protective Equipment
- reassignment
- remote work
- modifications to the work/service/support performed
- temporary, unpaid leave of absence

Any changes that need to be made will remain in place until such time that COVID-19 no longer poses a significant public health risk. These determinations will be made in a manner consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

For credible and up-to-date information on COVID-19, including symptoms and treatment, visit your local Public Health Unit's website.

**Note:** It is recommended that you consult the Ontario Human Rights Code, your Board of Directors, and a lawyer when creating a vaccination policy.



## Additional Resources

### [Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic 2021](#)

Webinar: ["We're All In This Together"](#)

In March 2021, Project READ Literacy Network, QUILL Learning Network, Literacy Link South Central, and Community Literacy of Ontario released a report based on a province wide study titled *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. As the title suggests, this report provides useful best practice information for LBS service delivery across many areas of operation, along with resources, sample forms, and tip sheets that LBS programs may find useful for serving learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Clear Writing for Clear Communication

Communication with the public is never more important than it is during a pandemic. People are receiving and reacting to a large amount of information every day. To make sure your information is engaging and understood by as many people as possible, consider using Clear Writing principles.

## What is Clear Writing?

Clear writing is a way of presenting information so that it is easy for everyone to read and understand.

Clear writing includes more than just the words that are used and how they are put together.

It considers:

1. How the material looks, as well as what it says
2. What the reader needs to know, as well as what the writer wants to say

Clear Writing makes it easier for:

- People who do not read well
- People whose first language is not English
- People who do not see well
- People who are too busy to read a large amount of information

## How do you write clearly?

Take a critical look at the written materials you use every day such as your pamphlets, brochures, form letters and application forms. Consider the overall appearance, the amount of information, the language and the writing style. Try to look at your materials as your readers do. The following is a sample of Clear Writing tips that can help you to make your information more clear.

### Plan your message

- Focus on the information that the reader needs to know
- Organize information in a way that is logical for the reader: e.g., most important to least important, step-by-step chronological order
- Make it easy for the reader to find important information

## Choose your words

- Speak directly to your readers in a tone that is friendly
- Use familiar words and phrases
- Avoid using jargon, technical terms and acronyms
- Cut out unnecessary words

## Write the way you speak

- Keep sentences short and simple
- List critical information apart from the text and put it at the beginning of your message
- Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out

## Graphics

- Make sure that illustrations and photographs clearly relate to the information provided
- Use graphics that are reflective of the population you're trying to target
- Avoid the use of graphics just to fill valuable white space

