

# Effectively planning the City's post-pandemic return to office

*"I'm glad the City gave staff an opportunity to share in this manner and I hope what was shared will be taken seriously and considered when making return to office plans." – City Employee*

## THE NEED

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 40% of the City of Seattle's workforce was mandated to telework in an effort to reduce the spread of the virus. In June 2021, Seattle reached the milestone of achieving 70% vaccination in our eligible population and WA Governor Jay Inslee began reopening the economy, which gave the City the opportunity to start thinking about reopening its offices and designing the 'new normal' for its workforce operations. The City needed strong project management to ensure effective citywide planning, as well as an approach for ensuring that City employees' voices were heard.

## OUR APPROACH

Working closely with our department partners, IP provided project management of the Citywide return to office planning to ensure there was consistent delivery of information to City departments and so the project was delivered in-scope and on-time. Through project management, technical assistance was provided to the interdepartmental team with writing and editing of content, creation of tools and resources for departments and stakeholder engagement through briefings, Cabinet listening sessions, monthly City Union meetings, office hours with departmental leads, and weekly return to office updates. IP also conducted employee engagement to provide City employees the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions about their experiences working during the COVID-19 pandemic and any concerns they have for returning to office. IP engaged with staff from seven departments through remote and on-site listening sessions, on-site lock boxes (for written responses), and online surveys, reaching a thousand on-site and teleworking employees, resulting in a collection of over five thousand responses to inform and provide recommendations for return to office planning.

## THE RESULTS

Leveraging lessons learned from telework during the pandemic, return to office approaches from other leading employers in the region and engaging with the City's employees, IP improved the City's ability to quickly develop a position on when employees should return to the office, why, and what the expectations would be for doing so. IP's project management ensured that the City developed a consistent, cohesive, thoughtful approach to planning that will have a lasting impact to how the City's workforce of 13,000+ employees operates in the future.

## READ MORE

[Employee engagement playbook](#)  
[Citywide employee engagement report](#)

## DEPARTMENT PARTNERS

City Attorney's Office  
City Budget Office  
Finance and Administrative Services  
Mayor's Office  
Office of Employee Ombud  
Seattle Human Resources  
Seattle IT

## EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Public Health Seattle-King County  
Port of Seattle  
University of Washington  
Microsoft  
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## PROJECT DURATION

February 2021-August 2021

## IMPACT

Improved consistency to return to office planning Citywide and reached ~1,000 employees through employee engagement to inform planning

## KEY DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

- Adrian Matanza (FAS)
- Aisha Foster (SHR)
- Arushi Kumar (CBO)
- Dr. Amarah Khan (OEO)
- Jim Loter (ITD)
- Kimberly Loving (SHR)
- Zahraa Wilkinson (CAO)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

- Maddy Hernandez (IP)