



MEMBERSHIP ADVISORY

Managing Your Museum's Pandemic Response PART 2: Workers and Employers

This resource has been developed to help you ask important questions and share resources that might be helpful in coordinating your museum's emergency response to COVID-19. These are the basics only. Emergencies change quickly and each organization's staffing and volunteer situation is unique. There are many more things to consider in an emergency, and the advice of Public Health Authorities should always take priority and be followed. Please consult with experts you have in your museum, community, and network, and monitor public health and emergency response networks regularly.

An earlier Alberta Museums Association (AMA) Advisory provided information about activating your emergency response. Since then, in Alberta, museums have been ordered to close to the public as [a State of Emergency has been declared under the Public Health Act](#). If you have emergency protocols in place, activate them as appropriate. This tip sheet assumes that you might not have those protocols in place or that they need a retooling to deal with a pandemic response.

Tear-Out Forms and Templates referenced in this resource or the [March 13, 2020, Membership Advisory](#) are published in [HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums](#) and are available free online in the [Alberta Museums Association Document Library](#). Click on "HELP! Resources."

Because announcements are being made daily, or even hourly, many of the resources provided here are general, so as not to become dated too quickly. Please monitor these websites as more information is made available for non-profits, employers, employees, small business owners, contractors, and freelancers. All of these have a role in our sector and the potential to impact our economy as drivers in recovery, and each is also likely to experience hardship resulting from the pandemic.

Reach out to your professional colleagues, co-workers, and friends in the field; share information widely, including with the AMA; and remember that we are all in this together. Community matters more than ever as the museum sector responds to this unprecedented pandemic crisis.

I. Workers: Employees, Contractors, Freelancers, Museum Service Business Owners

Aid for workers and small business owners has been announced by both the provincial and federal governments. Details about these programs will begin to emerge in the coming days and weeks. Monitor [COVID-19 for Albertans](#) and [Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan: Support for Canadians and Businesses](#) for more information.

II. Museums as Employers

As an employer in a pandemic situation, you have unique challenges to deal with in terms of staff safety, morale, and productivity. You will need to make decisions about working from home, essential staff, and possibly layoffs. Consider:

A. Who are our essential staff?

Your business continuity planning will need to identify which employees are essential to your organization's emergency response and continued operations. You may need to consider different strategies for managing essential and non-essential staff. Temporary layoffs may have different considerations in a pandemic: make yourself aware of your liabilities, risks, and options by consulting with legal counsel.

All museum staff are important and vital to your museum's success. "Essential Staff" in this context are those staff who the museum absolutely needs to ensure business continuity in light of an emergency. Some essential staff at your organization may be those dealing with:

- Health and Safety and Emergency Response
- Collections care and safety
- Communications
- Core staff critical to providing public programming when the museum reopens
- Financial management and processes
- Revenue generation, fund development or donor relations
- Building maintenance and operations
- Online services or programming
- Security
- Technology

B. How will we deal with stress and anxiety among our employees?

Mental health professionals during the 2013 floods reminded Albertans responding to the disaster to **REACT** to stress:

REMOVE yourself and your loved ones from danger.

EAT RIGHT and drink lots of water.

ACTIVITY. Get enough exercise and sleep.

CONNECT. Help others and accept help when needed.

TALK. Talk to family and friends. Your feelings are normal.¹

Talk about the psychological safety of your employees and take stress and anxiety seriously in an emergency. Does your employee benefits program provide access to psychologists and counsellors? Share resources with staff.

See also:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Coronavirus Disease 2019: Manage Anxiety & Stress.](#)
- Alberta Health Services: [Help in Tough Times](#)
- Alberta Health Services: [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health](#)
- Alberta Health Services: [Mental Health: Coping and Connection for Children & Families During COVID-19](#)

¹ See Crystal Willie, ed., *HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Alberta Museums Association, 2018), p. 222.

C. What employer resources should I be aware of?

For more information on the obligations and options available to employers, as well as business continuity resources, see:

- [Alberta Employment Standards Rules](#)
- [Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Standards](#)
- [COVID-19 support for employers and employees](#)
- [WCB: COVID-19 Employer Fact Sheet](#)
- [Alberta Assessment and Control of Psychological Hazards in the Workplace](#)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, [Business Continuity Plan: Infectious Diseases](#)
- Government of Canada, [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\): Resources for Canadian Businesses](#)

If you have a copy of HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums, see the following sections: 2.2.3 Business Continuity Planning, Business Impact Analysis, Developing a Business Continuity Plan; 3.3 Crisis Communications, 3.3.1 Communicating with Staff and Volunteers; 3.5.6 Mental Health and Emotional Stress

III. Working Remotely

Moving to remote working if you do not have a tradition of remote work can be daunting, especially when thinking through your technology setup. The good news is that there are many resources available, and, while the demand is certainly causing delays in some services, there are many free or affordable apps available to you. Consider the following:

A. Which staff will be working remotely?

Who will be working from home? Are all of your museum staff going to work from home, or are there essential staff that need to be on-site? What measures need to be put in place to protect those staff who are still going in? What will you do if you no longer have a choice? Monitor Public Health Authority websites for announcements as the crisis evolves.

B. What technology do we have or need?

What technology resources do your staff already have access to? If you do not have one already, make a spreadsheet of what laptops, smartphones, tablets, and printers your museum has; even desktops may need to be relocated to home offices. Note who they are assigned to. Next, find out which staff have personal computers and smartphones. What operating systems do they have, and will they be sufficient? Does everyone have internet access? Printers? Where are there gaps? Where will extra charges be incurred? Unlimited smartphone plans and many home wireless internet plans may have no additional cost. You may need to purchase additional technology: see how far you can get on what you have as an organization and among your staff. Prioritize purchases that keep critical services going, and ensure communication stays strong.

What is on the Cloud, and what information is tied to a particular device? Can staff continue to safely come in and use those devices? Is it feasible to have them relocated to key staff homes?

C. How will we meet and communicate?

Online meeting apps are in high demand but are also widely available. Use systems you already have in place if possible. If you need to set up new accounts, project and team management sites like [ASANA](#), [Trello](#), [Slack](#), or any messenger app (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc.) might be helpful. Ensure that you can share information and documents. Set up standing meeting schedules for work teams and periodic calls or video conferences for all staff. Mimic what you are used to doing in the office, but also be aware you may need to find different schedules or processes to adjust to new realities. Staff moving to remote working also report spending more time on the phone than usual as they make up for those small conversations that happen when everyone is sharing a space. Set up protocols and expectations for sharing information, be that meeting summary sheets, posts to internal message boards, emails, or something else.

For non-profits, Tech Soup offers discounted software and donated licences. See [Techsoup Canada](#) and the links at the bottom of this resource for a blog with ideas on what tools might work for you.

For Emergency Response Team meetings, see [Tear-Out 3.5 ERT Meeting Record](#).

D. What about at-home workspaces?

Truth is, a dedicated workspace in a spare room or office is ideal, but in emergency circumstances it might not be possible. You may have children at home and others isolating and working from home in the same space as you. Do your best to repurpose the space you have and find ways to both respect and set boundaries for the other members of your household who might be sharing your space. The good news is social media is full of creative work-from-home ideas at the moment.

E. How will we manage office hours?

Set clear expectations and expect to be flexible.

Because this is an emergency and not a typical work-from-home scenario, "office hours" might need to be fluid or flexible. Obviously, some positions have more rigid schedules than others. Employers have a right to expect hours are worked and employees have rights to care for children and others, and to take sick days, breaks, and other protections. In difficult circumstances, ensure you are aware of the obligations and protections afforded to employers and employees under [Alberta Employment Standards](#), and communicate clearly and often about expectations on both sides. There are additional protections being put in place related to the emergency, and museums with specific questions should seek advice from legal counsel. Monitor for changes.

Employers and employees who work remotely will often tell you that flexibility, trust, reasonable expectations, and compassion are important in any employment relationship. This is particularly significant in times of rapid change and crisis.

See also:

- Tamarack Institute's [Guidelines for Working Remotely](#). This excellent resource was developed for typical work-at-home situations and shares the experience of an organization that is a veteran at remote work. It is very helpful for outlining

- what works and what challenges can be anticipated. It is not meant as advice for remote working in a quarantine and should be interpreted accordingly.
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organization's (EVCO) [Frequently Asked Questions — COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
 - Alberta Non-Profit Network's (ABNN) [COVID-19 Resources for Nonprofits](#) (especially for donor relations and advocacy resources)
 - Tech Soup's [COVID-19: How Nonprofits Can Establish Effective Telecommuting Practices](#)

This guide has been compiled by Crystal Willie, Editor of *HELP! An Emergency Preparedness Manual for Museums*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Alberta Museums Association, 2018).