

Leader Guide: *Employee Conversations on Returning to Campus*



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

This guide is designed to help managers plan and engage in effective conversations with employees regarding the return to campus as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The return to campus is based upon the lifting of all public health safety restrictions. Granting flexible work options to employees is at the managers' discretion; operational needs of the role and the team must be met. Leadership decisions are best informed by employee and team input.

Key Messages

- The university is returning to a largely in-person learning environment this fall.
- The decision to move forward with returning to campus this fall is grounded in the latest health guidelines and scientific research.
- By early September, we expect faculty and staff will return to campus in some capacity, appropriate for the nature of their work and position.
- Guidelines for the interim period are determined by your SLT member and further refined by managers based upon operational requirements.
- We acknowledge the benefits of providing flexibility to employees; this needs to be balanced with operational needs.
- These are interim decisions and subject to change with reasonable notice to the employee.
- Supports are available for employees who are anxious about the return to campus.
- Employees will have a voice in the design of a longer-term remote program.

Timeline

June 2021

- Senior Leadership Team to provide leaders in their units with principles and guidelines on return to campus.

June/July 2021

- Reports-to-managers meet with their team as a group to discuss the guidelines and proposed implementation planning.
- Reports-to-managers meet with individual team members to discuss the operational requirements associated with a return to campus and specific flexibility requests.
- Should an employee request a [Workplace Accommodation](#) based on a Protected Ground (e.g., disability or family status), we may have a legal obligation to do so. Contact Staff Wellness (disability accommodations) or your HR Partner (non-disability accommodations).

July/August 2021

- Commencement of gradual return to campus, as appropriate for your team.
- Decision-making on requests for remote/hybrid work arrangements.

September 2021

- Employees to return to campus in some capacity, appropriate for the nature of their work and position.
- Adjust leadership approaches and team norms to align with work mode of team.

Preparing for the Conversation

- Give employees advance notice of the meeting and let them know what you want to discuss.
- Ensure the meeting is in a confidential and physically safe setting.
- Give advance thought to the feasibility of remote/hybrid work for each employee on your team.
- Assess the effectiveness of each employee during remote work periods (were they highly productive, did they struggle, was isolation an issue, etc.).
- Prepare questions to ask employees.

Questions to Guide the Conversation



- How are you feeling about returning to the campus?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What concerns do you have about returning to campus?
- What supports do you need to have a successful return to campus?

If the employee is requesting a remote/hybrid work arrangement as a personal preference:

- Tell me about your experience working remotely over the past 15 months – what worked/did not work well? What parts of your role are best performed in person?
- How was your effectiveness/productivity impacted?
- Is your remote work setup conducive to working effectively?
- (If relevant) Have you secured arrangements for family care (e.g., children, aging parents, pets)?
- What is your ideal workplace schedule – number of days remote vs. on campus?
- If your arrangement is agreed to, what efforts are you willing to make to ensure the team operations are not adversely impacted?

DO

- ✓ Be proactive and create an opportunity to meet with individual employees 1:1 to discuss their perspectives about returning to campus.
- ✓ Listen attentively during the meeting; be curious and open to ideas for how work can be performed in new and different ways.
- ✓ Be transparent with your team about the guidelines and principles governing flexible arrangements.
- ✓ Remind your employees that these are interim arrangements and are subject to change.
- ✓ If relevant, confirm the employee has secured arrangements for family care (e.g., children, aging parents, pets).
- ✓ Apply the decision-making criteria for flexibility consistently.

DON'T

- ✗ Make assumptions.
- ✗ Decline requests for flexible arrangements without careful consideration.
- ✗ Be prescriptive about work locations/schedules without fully understanding the implications.
- ✗ Forget to keep a pulse on how things are playing out.

Get Support: Contact your [HR Partner](#) for advice and support on decision-making

Resources: [COVID-19 Website](#), [FAQs](#) [Staff Wellness](#)

Workshops: [Leader Workshops](#) offered in July 2021