



Published on National Council of Nonprofits (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>)

Original URL: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/workforce-changing-its-time-consider-making-hybrid-work-permanent>

The Workforce Is Changing. It's Time to Consider Making Hybrid Work Permanent.

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With nonprofits finding it more difficult to fill open positions and seeing current employees lured away by higher-paying jobs, **it's important for nonprofits - those that have missions that can accommodate it - to develop the capacity to engage hybrid and remote employees.**

Hybrid work and other kinds of flexibility are attractive benefits for prospective employees, satisfiers for current staff, and a way to help our teams nurture work-life balance and reduce stress and burnout. We believe that **nonprofits can - and should - promote a work culture that prioritizes wellbeing and balance.**

While some nonprofit operations require people to be on-site to deliver services in person, work that typically takes place in an office can often be done remotely. Many nonprofit employees have been working in a hybrid or fully remote environment for nearly two and a half years. Most of us learned how to make it work "on the fly" during a public health crisis. We're now preparing to enter a new future that many hope will incorporate positive lessons learned during the pandemic. Let's take the time to be thoughtful and intentional about the **benefits of hybrid work**

and other flexible work models.

It's becoming clear that **most employees who have experienced it now prefer hybrid work** as a way to enhance work-life balance. In a [November 2021 McKinsey survey](#), more than 80 percent of survey respondents who worked under hybrid models over the past two years said they would prefer to continue hybrid work. Most of those said they'll look for other jobs if they're asked to return to fully on-site work.

People who are Black, those with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ and nonbinary employees were even more likely to contemplate leaving. Younger employees (18-34 years old) were a whopping 59 percent more likely to leave if required to return to full-time, on-site work than those who are 55-64 years old.

The workforce is changing. To retain skilled staff and attract new people, nonprofit employers will need to honor their employees' preferences – which means listening to employees.

In the for-profit world, [there's an emerging tension](#) between employers who want to see their employees in the office every day, and employees who have gotten used to freedom from the distractions of office life, liberation from the costs and delays of commuting, flexibility to deal with caregiving demands, and feeling that their health is protected. In the nonprofit community, job postings for remote or hybrid employees have become commonplace. Some nonprofits have even given up their offices completely.

Carmen Marshall, Chief Equity Officer at Maryland Nonprofits, was quoted in a recent article from the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, [Nonprofits Learn the Trials – and Pitfalls – of Ditching the Office](#), saying that **for some people of color, working from home has been a respite from hostile work environments**. “If you are Black, brown, other, if you're outside of the power structure, there's always been a consequence for you to work in an environment where you don't have any control over your comings and goings, your ability to speak out, the demand for you to keep quiet,” she said. “Remote work allows you to experience less [discrimination] because you are not in the presence of it.”

However, to reap the benefits for a diverse staff, **care must be taken to keep teams fully engaged**, connected, and inspired. In a McKinsey article exploring the survey cited earlier, [“Hybrid work: Making it fit with your diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy,”](#) the authors examine both the upside and the risks:

Hybrid work has the potential to offer a higher level of flexibility, a better work-life balance, and a more tailored employee experience. These can have a disproportionately positive impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, as well as on performance. Hybrid work [with some people in the office and others remote] also has the potential to create an unequal playing field and to amplify in-group versus out-group dynamics, which can flip those advantages to the liabilities side of the ledger.

Here at the National Council of Nonprofits, where [our network crisscrosses the country](#), geographic inclusion has long been an explicit part of our commitment to equity. For many years, we've routinely scheduled virtual events – conference calls, webinars, and Zoom meetings – to begin no earlier than 3:00 pm Eastern so nonprofits across six time zones can conveniently participate. Otherwise, conducting a meeting at, say, 10:00 am Eastern, requires nonprofit leaders in Hawai`i to be up and alert by 4:00 am their time, effectively excluding them.

More than half of our team works remotely from different states. Even before the pandemic, we had years of experience navigating the world of remote work and virtual convenings.

When the pandemic hit, our staff and network became more connected and engaged than ever. Along with so many others, our team developed our Zoom skills, grew even more intentional about inclusion, and got better lighting. We learned more about live transcription and [making virtual events accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing](#). We became comfortable with the reality of babies, toddlers, and pets “attending” meetings, and with some people turning their video off at times for a bit of a break or a bite to eat.

What we learned confirms what the McKinsey [authors write](#):

True flexibility must go beyond location to include the different preferences and needs of an increasingly diverse employee workforce. It demands a sharp focus on the reasons people have been leaving jobs, often without new job offers in hand: work-life balance and flexibility loom large, but employees also yearn for a greater sense of belonging and of feeling appreciated. Finding the sweet spot between hybrid work and strong inclusion can make an organization a highly attractive place to work but requires leaders, at all levels, to listen, to coach, and to think of flexibility not as an end point but as a set of evolving expectations, with regular

adjustments.

Nonprofits employing remote workers [must also take care to address issues](#) such as liability, non-discrimination policies, technology and equipment for home offices, and cybersecurity. [Managing a remote team](#) can be challenging, and may require becoming more systematic – and more adept – at approaches such as performance management.

The McKinsey article concludes:

Employers now face a risk/reward moment to reimagine a more flexible, inclusive hybrid work model that dovetails with an organization’s diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. This will not be easy work. But for leaders who show the sensitivity, creativity, and humility needed to shape a new hybrid work model, there could be dramatic gains in performance, organizational cohesion, and improved employee wellness, engagement, and retention.

Economic conditions will change, the pandemic will wane, and the current intense competition for talent will level off at some point. But ideally, we will capture some of the lessons learned over the past few years about **a more humane and equitable approach to work**. Hybrid and remote work can be an essential part of the solution.

Our Series on Creative Approaches to the Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis

This article is part of [a series describing creative, practical approaches to the workforce shortage crisis](#) that can elevate equity, address burnout and stress, and discover, nurture, and develop talent in nontraditional ways.

One of our five [core values](#) at the National Council of Nonprofits is “Honoring the Nonprofit Workforce,” which reflects our deeply held belief that “Nonprofits and their employees should have the respect and the resources needed to get their work done.”

That core value shapes our work creating and curating information to assist frontline nonprofits with their operations and capacity-building. It also drives much of [our advocacy work](#) promoting public policy solutions at the federal, state, and local

levels to get more funds to nonprofits stretched by the combination of growing needs, decreasing revenue, increasing costs, and rising salaries.