

Things to Consider Before a Staff Layoff

Decisions around layoffs are never easy, and the pressing decisions facing our organizations today as we respond to the COVID-19 crisis are putting many into the position of laying off employees that they had no intention of parting ways with prior to this epidemic.

This list of considerations is meant for Boards of Directors, Executive Directors/CEO's, managers and HR professionals facing the tough decision of making staff reductions in the days ahead.

Know Your Options

- Who are my employees? Full time permanent, contract staff, hourly rates employees, etc.
- Check with your funders to ensure that agreements/scheduled grant payments are not being affected, and if they are offering emergency funding to help their organizations cope with the impacts.
- Do they have a signed contract of employment? If so, what does it say?
- How long has the employee worked with our organization?
- Is there an opportunity for my organization and the employee to participate in the Work-Share Program?
- How many employees are we laying off? If as many as 50 within a four-week period, we must inform the Government of Alberta and fill out required forms.
- Will there be a possibility of recalling these employees?
- If you are reducing work hours, are there legal and financial implications to shifting employees from salary to hourly that you need to be aware of?
- What is the tentative last day of work?
- Consult a lawyer or human resources professional.

What Supports Can You Provide

- Letter of recommendation and networking connections with other organizations or businesses that may be seeking their expertise.
- If the employee uses organization-provided assets such as a laptop or cell phone, consider if you have flexibility to allow them to use those items for a short time while they get their own devices set up.
- Provide fact sheets and resources for accessing and applying for employment insurance benefits and other financial relief options being made available.

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- Consider if your organization and benefits provider allows for/can afford continuance of health benefits during this time.

The Human Element

- While many offices are closed down and in-person meetings are cancelled, do try to meet with your employees face to face via video chat if possible for your layoff notice, audio only as a second choice. Wherever possible, email and formal letters should be a follow-up to a kind and considerate human conversation.
- Go back to your Mission and Vision statements as an organization, and allow those values to give perspective to the decisions you are making and how you're going to address your team in the days and weeks ahead.
- Empathy** is the key word when considering lay-offs, the attitude of a leader is more important than words written on a letter. Being willing to help by offering support through letters of recommendation, providing information sheets on government programs for financial assistance, being accessible for phone calls or emails will all go a long way in walking the talk and reinforcing your organizations core values.