**BASSC Critical Information Exchange**

**Remote Work: Ergonomics & Equipment**

**7.10.20**

**Key Themes**

* The initial IT equipment deployment went extremely well in many counties.
* There are ongoing questions related to equipment costs and sustainability with respect to remote work arrangements.
* There are emerging concerns about privacy both with respect to data protection issues and virtual interactions.
* On the technology side there is a bandwidth issue, with access getting a little slower and stickier as so many staff are accessing agency systems remotely.
* Employee agreements are a key focal point for strategies for how agencies are helping to organize this new way of working.
* Surveys are being used to understand the experience of staff with regards to remote work.
* Other important tools include safety checklists and asset tracking forms.
* Looking to the future, the role of committees and task forces is emerging as important, including the composition of these entities, as well as what they're tasked with doing.
* Future concerns are also focused on power shut offs and outages, and other issues related to the fire season we are entering.

**County Presentation #1**

* Working on several different aspects of the reentry process, one of which is ergonomics.
* Current ergonomic request structure has mostly focused on getting everyone the equipment that they need, including laptops, monitors, and keyboards.
  + Most of that was done initially in March and employees were asked what equipment they believed they would need to take with them.
  + Supervisors would document what the employee was taking – typically the computer, laptop or a mini computer, as well as a soft phone versus a cell phone.
* Learned as time went on, that some folks needed a different keyboard or a different monitor.
  + They would contact our Office of Civil Rights and they would assist with getting them the additional keyboard or mouse.
  + Alternatively, they could go to their office location, schedule that time with their supervisor to enter the building and pick up the items, and the supervisor would document it.
* We have had some worker’s comp issues come up once people went to working from home.
  + In that case, they would go through the regular workers comp process.
  + Even though in our telecommute agreement, there is a video and there is discussion about how to properly set up your workstation, some issues have emerged.
* As we're transitioning to re-entry and transitioning some of our staff to full time telecommuting, we're looking at what the ergonomic guide and process should be moving forward.
  + We have created a policy around this, making sure that employees are aware of what they can take from the office.
    - Desktop items, such as laptop, computers, monitors, keyboards, and even chairs can be taken, but furniture cannot be removed from the office.
    - We want to make sure that any items can be safely removed and that no one's going to strain themselves, and there are no injuries.
    - We can't ask our staff to go into anyone's home, so furniture is off the table.
    - Employees are not taking everything from their desk, just the items that they need to do the essential aspects of the job.
  + Employees are responsible for setting equipment up and the IT department will help to talk them through setup as well.
    - Moving forward with reentry, we're making sure that the employees take the office ergonomics awareness training, on our city-wide portal.
    - Discusses how to set up your workspace, adjusting your chair, proper monitor height, avoiding eye strain, and making sure you stretch regularly.
    - When we're on multiple calls and zooms, in one-on-one and team meetings, we're not getting up and moving around, so it’s important to remind employees to stretch.
  + As employees are filling out the online telecommute agreement, there's a portion of the agreement that they should click on to read through the expectations of setting up an ergonomically safe work environment.
    - If the employee still feels they need additional assistance, we have been in talks with the city to contract with a vendor that will do ergonomic assessments.
    - We haven’t determined yet if that would involve someone coming into the person's workspace in their home, or would be done via Zoom.
  + The overall process for getting another mouse, or a keyboard that better fits the employee’s needs, would be again to make sure they watch the video. They may contact the OCR, and then set up a time to come in and pick up the equipment.
  + We're going to asset tag everything, and it will be scanned and that will be attached to the person's name, along with the laptop and other equipment that they've received.
  + If they need a different chair or keyboard, even if they had an ergo keyboard but it’s still not working, the process still involves making sure they email HSA ergonomics.
    - They’re going to require them to watch the video and then they will have an interview to assess exactly what kind of keyboard will work best for them.
    - And if it's a workman's comp issue, they will go through the regular workman's comp process and we will be purchasing equipment for those individuals.
* We also have begun to think through the ergonomic replacement process.
  + As you're using this equipment, it may get worn, you might need more cables – what would that look like.
  + We have a proposed process where the employee would again reach out to our OCR office, and we go through our inventory, make sure we have whatever that replacement part is, and then we're able to swap it out using the asset tag process.
* For employees just coming to pick up equipment, we’re going to pilot in the next month with our HR department a process of scheduling times for employees to come in and pick up all the equipment that they need.
  + They will document what they took, the supervisor would get a copy and then we would have it asset tagged, so that it will go into our asset tracking system.
  + But if the asset tracking system is not running yet, then we would use the hard copy document to document exactly what was taken and take pictures, and so that when we're ready with the asset traffic tracking system, we will be able to include it there.
  + The asset tracking system is working right now, but it's not open to all areas just yet.
  + We're waiting for our HR department to get access so that we can enter information into the asset tracking system, and our facilities team will be doing the same thing.

**County Presentation #2**

* We're not as far along as County #1, but what we've had for several years is mobile work for some of our employees that work daily out in the field.
  + This includes, for example: a social worker in IHSS, appeals officers or court officers, child welfare workers, and some eligibility outreach workers, who mainly work out in the field seeing our customers.
  + Employees in these roles only need to touch down in the office occasionally for meetings etc.
  + These mobile workers were given their laptops, we allowed them to take their small printer/scanner. They had a laptop bag with these items and a keyboard and mouse.
* We didn't let them take home any other furniture because their focus was to be out in the field.
  + We created hoteling spaces in all of our offices.
  + If they want to come into one of the offices, they could touch down there and do paperwork, etc., or just have a place to land.
  + Typically, they start work from home, or at the location of their first appointment.
* It seemed to be working pretty well.
  + There were some kinks and some concerns in terms of ensuring accountability.
  + But I always remind everyone that accountability inside the office is the same outside.
  + Whatever your expectations were in the office, those are the expectations outside the office.
  + Where employees are not working up to speed, or just could not work out in the field, we bring them back in.
  + It's not a situation that works for everybody – if they start having ergo issues or they had a lot of equipment, like sit/stand workstations, they were brought back into the office.
* We also have telecommute arrangements, mostly with supervisors that were telecommuting one or two days a week.
  + We're now getting ready to expand it officially with some staff due to the pandemic.
  + We're strategizing how that will look – we've got quite a few more laptops for people.
  + We don't allow people to go into employees’ homes and look at their setup, instead we take their word for it.
  + We have telecommute agreements that we set up.
  + We go through the same workers comp process, but, if there's somebody that needs a lot of equipment, we just make arrangements for them to work in the office.

**County Presentation #3**

*Presenter #1*

* We were well positioned in the beginning to move to remote work.
  + We had all the equipment we needed, hardware and software, already in house.
  + We transitioned the majority of our staff to be capable of doing telephonic signatures, so we don't need to have clients coming to the office for interviews or to sign documents.
  + We have our team task management system that helps tracking work and accountability.
  + We also have a system of tracking all equipment that's being deployed.
* What went well:
* The IT department’s response and understanding of what we need was really remarkable and key to the success. They were able to execute the telework transition for more than 1100 staff within two weeks.
* Flexibility was also key, including making do with what people had while waiting for the correct equipment to arrive. For example, we had a little snafu with the headsets. People were using the old headsets, waiting for the new ones, and people have been very flexible and willing to work with us.
* Management’s patience and understanding when things didn't go as smoothly as they would like was also very helpful.
* The collaboration with the equal opportunity office, labor relations and especially our union throughout this deployment.
* Something that we have to resolve is organizing work in the office that cannot be performed remotely. since we deployed the majority of our staff to telework.
  + Our staff is about 85% of our workforce – that's about 1100 staff that we have teleworking and about 200 come to the office.
  + These 200 that come into the office take care of homeless assistance issuances, homeless mail, and see certain clients who don't have a phone and need services.
  + They also do any printing and mailing that’s necessary.
* From an ergonomics perspective, we allowed our staff to take all their equipment home, including chairs.
  + There are those who could not work from home long term because they have some limitations that cannot be accommodated at home.
  + They either work from the office full time or do some part-time home work.
* Keeping communication going was really a priority throughout this process.
  + It has included web based interactive Zoom sessions with managers, supervisors, and groups that has allowed connection and peer to peer support.
* The process has also involved some challenges and raised potential concerns.
  + Supervising people remotely can raise issues of economic inequality, as we have discussed in other sessions.
  + When school starts, many staff must juggle work with school for their children.
  + In our county, the majority of schools are starting the new school year remotely, putting pressure on parents.
  + It also puts pressure on us as managers to ensure that work is done, while being flexible to these needs that that staff will have.
  + Sure we all share concerns about budgets and resource constraints. The budget situation will require us to learn how to assess and navigate ergonomics at home, while taking cost into consideration.

*Presenter #2*

* Background/behind the scenes look at the efforts that took place to deploy roughly 700 laptops to everybody and push software out to about 1300 machines.
* During the first two weeks when the shelter in place order was announced, we started scrambling behind the scenes
  + What really helped us was the concerted efforts between the departments, not just Technology Services (TSS), but our Department of Aging and our Department of Family and Children's Services.
  + There was a concerted effort based on the communications, relationships and partnerships that we had already built with the departments and with TSS.
* The SIP order was put in place around the 16th, effective Tuesday the 17th.
* At that point, we sprung into action; we contacted all of the offices, started distributing laptops.
  + All of the laptops had locks and the workers themselves didn't have access to these locks – it’s usually just the IT department and also their office coordinators or the office managers.
  + So we quickly labeled all the laptops, with the keys, and handed them out so that the ones who already have laptops could take them home.
* When we started sheltering in place, we had almost 600 staff who had not been issued laptops.
* Behind the scenes, we brought our asset management team as well as our telecom and our network teams and our field support teams together to buy new laptops, load the images onto them, and push all the software that was needed.
  + They had some challenges loading the images because the laptops that we were able to buy were the newer models and the images we had were for the previous model.
  + What normally would take about 45 minutes to an hour and a half, took about 4 hours.
  + Sometimes after trying to image something for four hours, it crashed and we would have to start all over.
  + So it was a lot of trial and error behind the scenes.
* Our telecom team came up with a quick solution related to using telephonic signatures, recording the actions from clients during the interviews.
  + A lot of these laptops, even though they did have this technology, there was not a way for them to do that without a desk phone because of licensing and equipment issues.
  + They found a solution called the IP communicator, essentially a phone emulator that allows you to receive phone calls that are from your desk via transfer to your laptop.
  + So they didn't have to have a physical phone which also helps when they're at home and they don't have enough desk space.
  + They can answer their calls and use multi lines through their laptops using this IP communicator emulator.
* During the first week there was a lot of scrambling, with people working around the clock.
  + One group was putting the images on the laptops, getting them ready.
  + Another group, after the installation of the IP communicator software, had to configure it and assign it an extension, so that when the physical phone would ring it would go to the virtual extension on their laptop, requiring a one to one match.
  + We had another team that was consulting with County Counsel and county security and privacy.
  + The staff that absolutely needed to have their scanners had to check out scanners. We weren't short of supplies on scanners. However, there were legal matters related to staff having that content and the physical paper with client information at home, which required working with legal staff as well.
* We issued cell phones for staff who didn't have internet access at home or who were in an area where Internet was very slow, or if they live in a community where they're sharing that Wi Fi signal with others. The cell phones enabled staff to use the hotspot.
* After the second week when we distributed all the cell phones, the laptops and the software, the docking stations finally arrived and we sent them, so that the ones that didn't have laptops yet were able to bring their dual monitors home and then finally we received the headsets.
* For the laptop deployment process, we set up an assembly line.
* We had a group of folks tagging the asset management.
* For the employees that already have laptops, it was an effort to push the software out and allow them to take all of their equipment home.
* A major challenge related to the docking station, because without the docking station, they could not use the dual monitors, they would be limited to just their laptop monitor and one external monitor. This made it difficult for staff to see CalMeds and all the other screens they need to view; they need to have that extra-large screen.
* What really worked well for us is the partnership with everybody.
  + In the very beginning, we got together even before the shelter in place order happened, so that we had actually started talking about this and we had a single point of contact and a single point of entry.
  + The managers were the main point of contact for their offices and so all of the communications worked really well, as we funneled information through them, they provided information to me, which I then communicate to TSS.
  + We also had developed training videos and we provided hard copies of instructions on how to connect, how to use their equipment.
  + That included an ergonomic diagram of how they should position their laptops and their monitors, the type of chairs that they should be sitting in, eye level positioning, etc.
  + It was a very concerted effort and everybody had the mentality of, for the greater good. And everyone was very flexible.

**Presentation Questions**

Of the staff that are in the office, are they rotating tele-working, and how did you go about choosing the staff? What about clerical - are they in telework arrangements?

County #3, Presenter #1:

* It's dependent on the job function that the person is doing.
* Most of our clerical staff that are processing our mail and documents and answering phones are in the office based on their job duties.
* The majority of eligibility workers come to the office once or twice a week, depending on need.
* But we also have some staff that voluntarily come to the office and work; we of course ensure that they have enough space to keep social distancing and they are using protective equipment so that we don't have issues with infections within the office.

County #1:

* We are also doing some rotations for clerical staff, as well as eligibility staff.
* In addition to that, we had a huge number of staff who were DSW's, so we didn't have them rotating into the office because they were deployed either at our hotel sites or at our Emergency Operations Center.
* Part of reentry planning involves determining whether we are going to rotate staff in and out.
  + We will be adding to our telework agreement a full time telework option that has never been an option before.
  + We're going to have a portion of our staff that will be full time telework and then we have a middle group that we call regular recurring.
  + We have about 600 staff who can't telework.
    - We're looking at how we can rotate those people in and out, and what tasks they could be doing when they're not in the office if they traditionally have a task that must be done in the office.
    - Are there aspects of the work that they can do from a remote location that can continue.
  + So it's a combination of arrangements, and it all depends on job function basically.
* We have made some adjustments to workstations to ensure physical distancing.
  + We have a face covering policy and hand sanitization stations all over.
  + We ask that no one uses the same workstation as another employee, but if they must, e.g., for an interview, there is a sanitization station with cleaner and disposable towels to wipe down the common areas before they start and when they're done.
  + We also encourage handwashing.

**Breakout Session Report Backs**

Group #1

* Collectively we found that our IT professionals really worked hard to get staff the equipment that they needed to get everyone out the door, whatever out the door means for your organization.
  + They were able to get laptops, mini-computers, surface pros, so that worked very well.
  + Some people who use things like remote desktop find this even more helpful than actually getting equipment, because it was just a matter of setting up the desktop.
  + A couple of folks mentioned basic equipment, such as a Surface Pro and a cell phone, noting that having basic equipment that you can pick up and go was very helpful.
* Several big challenges came up.
  + One related to privacy around the tools we use, including Zoom and Teams, and recording.
    - In County #1, the Sunshine Act which governs public access to records raises the question will a meeting become part of public record. For example, will this become part of a deposition or other process.
    - Another challenge relates to doing interviews using Zoom or Teams and putting the questions for the interview in the Chat, although typically interview questions should be kept private. If you put them in Chat, that candidate can have access to the questions and maybe even share them.
    - So there was some discussion about how to work with legal teams.
  + Another challenge involves bandwidth, with everyone now online in the agency, which slows down our tools and our connections.
  + Another challenge related to rules about bringing equipment home.
    - Some agencies are stricter than others on what you could take home.
    - Not everyone could take a monitor and a nice keyboard home – all they could take was their laptop and the phone, maybe.
    - Significant ergo needs also pose a challenge, if you have someone who has a serious ergo set up and they're not able to have that same setup at home because they can't move the furniture.
      * We need to determine how to ensure their safety, and that we're not exacerbating any issues or creating any new issues.
      * For example, some of our workstations now have the monitors on mobile arms, which you can't just pick and take with you.
      * So, budget wise, what does that mean for your county to be able to adjust and provide additional monitors, what are the costs to provide additional chairs.
      * There was an ask for a safety checklist that maybe we could share with the group related to ergonomics in the home, a quick and easy checklist that a staff member could just look through and say, Yes, I'm doing this. Oh no, I'm not doing that.

Group #2

* County #3 already had policies and procedures in place for teleworking, so they quickly implemented that for all of their staff.
  + They had staff sign documentation or acknowledgments regarding having an appropriate workspace and understanding confidentiality of client information in that workspace.
  + The County also set up a structure to be able to sign out equipment so any equipment removed from the department could be tracked.
  + For ergonomic equipment, the county is still working on developing a process, but there have been some allowances for staff to take chairs home.
  + The ability to use telephonic signatures was quite useful.
  + About a week and a half to two weeks in they switched the VPN connection which greatly helped the departments.
* In County #1, staff who had laptops were working from those, while other folks were able to take desktops home. Cell phones were deployed to their staff. They’re still working on getting a formal teleworking process setup.
* It sounds like we're all pretty much in the same place in regards to ergonomics.
* Counties #1 and #2 both have checklists and are looking at how there can be some more support and oversight for ergonomics at home.
* Some of the concerns include computer fatigue for staff and how that is starting to play out.
* Considering the future, County #3 has an overall agency committee looking at return to work, and has department and bureau committees that are looking at their recovery.
  + They're looking at a phased approach, where clients and folks are coming in, it's for a short, quick interaction and then they're gone.
  + An intermediate Plan would follow, and then a longer-term plan for when it’s possible to get back to the new normal.
* County #2 is also working on return to work, doing alternate work hours and staggering shifts.

Group #3

* For several counties, before the shelter in place orders, telework was not very common.
* However, in March, they made it quickly accessible and fairly easy for most people to convert to telework.
* Approximately 80 to 85% of the staff are teleworking at least a few days a week in those counties.
* They need to complete work agreements which consists of questions regarding the childcare plan, how to ensure continuity of business needs, how will the supervisor and manager manage performance in the duties and expectations of the role.
* They also have to do a safety checklist and submit pictures of the work environment that they're going to be working in so that those can be reviewed and considered for adherence to the telework agreement.
* Supervisors and managers are responsible for tracking the work of individuals, and how and where the work is tracked is based on different classifications.
  + For example, some employees have to submit activity logs for every hour that they work when they are teleworking.
  + As far as ensuring success and ramping staff up for success, supervisors are required to review duties with their team members.
  + They are required to have lots of connection with their team members and they must complete two courses in two of the counties regarding safe remote computing and ergonomics.
  + In these counties they have one hour of training that has five videos on productivity, confidentiality, 10 tips for telework, how to make telework a team sport, and 12 keys to building and maintaining successful remote teams.
* The supervisor and managers give the first round of approval to telework, then it's pushed up through the leadership in the department and eventually over to risk management.
* As far as the ergonomic evaluation, two counties both use an online tool, and they look at the photos that are submitted to ensure that the home work environment does look basically ergonomically acceptable.
  + One of the counties has started implementing online or virtual ergo evaluations.
  + This county has implemented a telework task force in order to explore more telework opportunities and how they can make it more effective in their environment.

**Discussion**

Question: How do you expand the amount of equipment that's available to as many people as you have working remotely, especially with regards to monitors and keyboards?

County #1:

* In reference to monitors and keyboards, our IT department had set up a procurement previously to swap out some equipment, so they had some stock on hand.
* But what we're finding, especially with our training department, is that the Trainers need or are requesting slightly different equipment. Many trainers are now going from the extra monitor that was initially given to them to a monitor that has audio included, and it's a larger monitor so that they can they can toggle between presentations when they're using Zoom or Teams.
* As it relates to our keyboards, our Office of Civil Rights which does a lot of the workers’ comp and ADA investigations, had stock, including a couple of different kinds of keyboards and mice. They've been taking each request and giving employees the opportunity to either choose a keyboard or mouse that would better fit them or listening to what the concern is, and then trying to fit them to the correct equipment.

Question: Besides technology equipment, are organizations allowing their staff to take their chairs or their other items to their home?

County #1:

* Initially we had the idea that if you are regular recurring telecommuting, you came into the office more than 60% of the time, you get two chairs.
* We quickly realized we didn't have enough chairs to do this, so staff will now have the option of taking their chair and are responsible for coming and picking it up and getting it home.
* We have had brief discussions about what it's going to look like when all these chairs have to come back, but right now we just want to make sure that employees have a chair that's adjustable, has armrests, if that's what they need; since we're not providing stipends to buy furniture, this is the best option.
* When shelter in place first started, we basically said take what you need; what I asked my staff to do specifically was take pictures of what they took, so that I would have it documented, and then once we came up with what our plan was going to be, we could then add that information to the record. We do have an asset tracking system, and we're anticipating that facilities and HR will be able to tap into that, so we'll know based on your employee ID number, all of the equipment that you have at home.

County #3:

* We allowed chairs, footrests, monitors, keyboards, all that except for actual furniture, and we had tracking sheets for supervisors to sign the equipment out. The sheet listed everything that was checked out by the employee.
* I think each Bureau manager probably had their method, but some may have written the serial number without a detailed description. I think everyone did do their due diligence of filling out the form, but initially there was confusion around whether they get to take both monitors home or just one monitor.
* The main priority was take what you need to be productive.

County #2:

* We let people take their chairs, anything that is small – foo rest, keyboard, mice.
* But we're not providing furniture nor are we allowing them to take furniture.
* We were delivering the chairs at one point, but we're not doing that, either.

Question: Is anyone planning on doing a survey of the workforce that is teleworking, pre telework/post telework/mid stage, to see whether their satisfaction levels are up or down, if their productivity is up or down, what their perceptions are, their level of connection?

County #4:

* We did a survey for managers and a survey for staff and we're going to do a follow up in August, tracking their perspective and their experience with working and what's not.
* Anything to do with poor performance needs to be addressed immediately, and supervisors still have to maintain the connection with staff and performance, and document.
* We're also looking at the carbon footprint, looking at how many miles aren't being traveled in cars to try to show that benefit.
* Confidentiality is also very important; for example, if your kids are running through the room and you're with your client online. We’ll make sure that confidentiality is being respected and we don't have any breaches.
* In addition, we are working with the Union to make sure that they're involved in the discussion at every step.

County #1:

* We've offered mostly informal opportunities for staff to give their feedback, but there is a survey in the works.
  + I believe it's with our communications team and our Office of Innovation because we also don't want to inundate our staff with too many surveys.
  + Once you raise the idea of a survey, many programs want to add to it, so they're working to try and make something that's tighter so that hopefully staff will respond.
* We have received some informal feedback around what the experience has been like, and have learned that we made assumptions that telework would be easy for our staff.
  + We assumed they had a place to set up where they could work, that would be quiet, that they had Wi Fi at their houses.
  + We've since found out that there was a lot of bias and privilege operating in those assumptions, especially in counties where it's very expensive to live, and people are living in roommate situations, or with a family in every bedroom.
  + So we needed to check ourselves, and the assumption that the employee can have a space while the children need to still do school and the partner still needs to do work, and everybody's going to get a different room or a different corner of the house.
  + We've since had to dial it back and decide on a case by case basis, as we’ve had employees come back and say I can't work from home, there’s just too many people in my house.

County #2:

* We asked staff, are you interested, and one of our older clerical staff said, Let me think about it. She came back and said, I have two grandchildren, six and nine. No, I want to want to come into the office, I'd rather not be at home.
* We talked about that in some discussions. What happens when you have staff that say, I do not want to telecommute, I'd rather be in the office. I feel most productive in the office.
* A lot of our staff in my department are feeling a disconnect because they miss their peers and they're realizing how helpful it is when they're in the office, they can just peek over the cubicle or go around the corner and ask a co-worker a question.
* There were a lot of assumptions about that.

County #3:

* We’re starting to see staff burning out, because with working from home, you're not going to and from work, or moving from one building to another for meetings.
* With virtual meetings, we're squeezing them in back to back from eight in the morning, all the way to sometimes 6 or 7 o'clock at night because we need to get these things done.
* We didn't realize, and we were not that mindful of this dynamic. But it's starting to burden a lot of the staff and they're burning out.