

# RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

MDS ARCHITECTS COVID-19 WORKPLACE STRATEGY • MAY 2020



MDS  
ARCHITECTS



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## COVID-19 WORKPLACE STRATEGY • MAY 2020

Throughout the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, MDS Architects has remained committed to serving our clients and meeting each project's needs. Our priority continues to be the safety of our staff and colleagues and also to minimize, as much as possible, any disruption to project schedules.

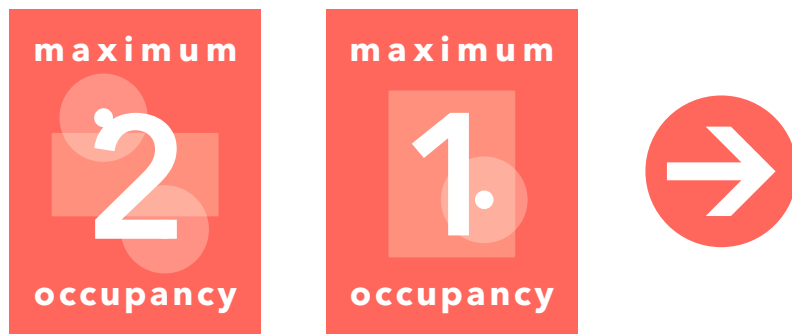
After performing a thorough analysis of our office, surveying our staff, and following state and local recommendations, MDS developed a strategy for returning to the workplace and resuming normal business practices with increased safety measures. This strategy is informed by our health care design experience and understanding of CDC and OSHA guidelines and infection control best practices.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Prioritize staff health, safety and productivity
- Follow evolving local public health guidelines and government mandates for working remotely and returning to the workplace
- Engage in an ongoing dialogue with staff to understand everyone's unique concerns and personal health needs—for both individuals and their families
- Maintain flexibility in accommodating staff needs as the firm gradually returns to the workplace
- Apply CDC and OSHA guidelines and infection control best practices in establishing new protocols for working in the office and visiting construction sites
- Embrace innovation in modifying our work practices to maintain team collaboration, communication and client service

## PREPARING THE OFFICE

- Graphic communications will be installed in the office to promote and remind staff of our one-way circulation path, occupancy counts for shared spaces and good health practices we need to follow for staff safety.
- As needed we will add workstation dividers to assist in an additional layer of safe distancing.
- Daily cleaning practices will be implemented in the office to minimize the transmission of germs in our workplace. All will be responsible to participate in this cleaning process. A cleaning log will be used to track the frequency of cleaning in each space.
- We have purchased PPE and cleaning supplies such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, gloves and masks will be provided to the office. Our regular daily cleaning service will also be in place.
- “Crowd Control” has been determined from individual conversations with each staff member to determine their comfort level in returning to the office during Phase 1. A staggered work schedule has been determined from those conversations and will be managed by the interactive office in/out calendar and oversight by Joanne. There will be a limit maximum number of people in the office at one time, determined by local recommendations and mandates.



## IN-OFFICE HEALTH + WELLNESS

- Staff will be required to sign in and sign out every day you are in the office. This is critical for contact tracing if there is a positive diagnosis within the office.
- Everyone, including visitors when allowed, must wear a face mask when in the office. You may remove your mask to eat at your desk. We request you wear a clean mask each time you come into the office. *Refer to the instructional video on the intranet for use and care of face masks.*
- You are not required you to wear gloves in the office, if you chose to do so, please wear clean gloves each time you come into the office. They should be placed in a bag when removed and not left sitting on your desk. *Refer to the instructional video on the intranet for use of gloves.*
- Good handwashing is still the best practice for maintaining good health and controlling the spread of germs. We will provide hand sanitizer at each workstation and in the public corridor and “high touch” zones.
- When using shared devices (mouse/keyboard) in meeting zones, please use disinfecting wipes to clean all surfaces and to wipe down the table and seats after each use.
- Please clean up your desk area so that horizontal surfaces are easy for you to wipe down.
- We encourage anyone bringing their lunch to keep it in a cool pack at their desk. If you choose to use the refrigerator properly, we are requiring your food, including condiments, to be stored in a bag in the refrigerator. No loose condiments will be allowed in the refrigerator. Food cannot be stored loosely in the drawers or on the shelves.

- The kitchen will be limited to one person at a time. When using the kitchen you will be required to wipe down all horizontal surfaces, door handles, faucet and appliance (coffee, micro and toaster oven) controls. We encourage you to bring in silverware and dishes that are for your use only and to keep them at your desk. We will have compostable paper goods/utensils for those that prefer to use disposable products.
- The coat closet shall not be used at this time. Personal coats should be kept at your desk.

### IN-OFFICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES

- CDC physical distancing guidelines – maintaining 6’ separation minimum– should be followed within the office.
- We are implementing a “one way” traffic pattern to limit the amount of cross traffic for staff safety. We will be providing graphics on the floor to assist in the traffic flow. See flow diagram on page 8.
- We request you do not approach anyone’s desk (including Joanne) to speak to your colleagues, you should use the phone to communicate.
- If you have a team meeting in the office, you must wear your face mask and sit 6’ apart. At the end of your meeting you need to wipe down the table, chairs, keyboard and mouse.
- We encourage using GoToMeeting even when in the office to have a team meeting so that you can see faces and the smiles of your team members!
- If you are not using a web cam, we encourage you use it as it helps with better communication and synergy to the team. We will provide you with a web cam and head set if you do not have one.

- We have put a cap on the number of people at the meeting areas. Refer to the capacity plan for the required numbers. We will have signage at each meeting area to identify the capacity.

### CLEANING PROTOCOL

- **Desk cleaning:** Please keep your desk surface as clear as possible to allow for easy wipe down at the end of each day. You will be responsible for wiping down your desk surface, phone, keyboard and mouse.
- **Building management plans:** TBD
- **Conference meeting area cleaning:** When entering a meeting area, you should use hand sanitizer before and after using a meeting space. You will need to wipe down the computer keyboard, mouse, horizontal surfaces, chairs and door handles.
- **Kitchen and bathroom cleaning:** Before and after using these spaces, you should wipe down all horizontal surfaces, door handles, touch pad/controls.
- If there is a confirmed COVID case, the office will be closed and all staff will be notified. If there has been any breach in policy, contact tracing will be done and any affected staff will be notified immediately per CDC and OSHA guidance. Any affected staff should consult with their primary care physician. In addition, the office will be closed for a deep cleaning and the staff will be notified when the office re-opens. Individual privacy will be always be maintained.



## SELF AWARENESS/COLLEAGUE COURTESY

### *When to stay home:*

- Stay home if you are experiencing any symptoms of illness or have been exposed to anyone suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19. Contact your project manager if you are unable to work.
- If you have tested positive you should not come back to work until you have had two negative tests at least 24 hours apart or until you have a letter from your doctor.
- Allergies and Sinus flair up are prevalent this time of year. If you have cold like symptoms, continuous coughing, nose blowing, clearing of throat, you may not come into the office. Although not contagious, the perception of symptoms may cause anxiety to others in the office.
- If you are concerned about whether or not you should come in to work, err on the side of caution and work from home that day.
- DO NOT come into the office when sick because you do not have any sick time hours left. If you do come into the office, you will be sent home.

## SITE VISIT/CONSTRUCTION ADMINISTRATION POLICY

MDS has instituted guidelines for site visitations and construction administration services to respond to the current COVID-19 situation. We understand that the continuation of construction varies for each project and jurisdiction, but this document seeks to communicate our position as a firm.

Where construction continues in compliance with local guidelines and regulations, we will continue to provide construction administration (CA) services to these projects. However, we will review our CA services in a rational way which assures the proper safety protocols are in place and respects our individual team members' health and safety concerns. Therefore, we are implementing the following guidelines for CA services during this period.

- The contractor or Construction Manager (CM) has the sole responsibility for maintaining site safety and the safety of individuals working on and around the site.
- We Request a copy of the CM's COVID Safety Plan for review to ensure that proper protocols are in place to ensure that our teams can be protected.
- All attempts should be made to hold meetings virtually.
- When in person meetings are required, try to conduct outside.
- We expect that everyone will wear masks and maintain 6' separation.
- To the degree possible the CM should upload photographic and/or record of progress to minimize requirements for site visits.
- Site visits should be essential, carefully pre-planned and coordinated with A/E team and be minimized.
- When required we request that Architect's site visits occur at the end of the day just after workers have left.
- Spaces should be complete before request is made for punchlists.
- MDS will limit the number of representatives on site visits for safety reasons.

## VISITORS

- Lunch-and-Learns or vendor presentations will not be allowed until further notice. We will re-evaluate this status throughout Phase 1. We encourage staff to meet with vendors via teleconferencing or participating in Webinars to earn learning units. A reminder this time is not billable time to the office.
- Product reps may not come to the office to update the materials library. They can mail new updates to the office.
- Fed/Ex, UPS and USPS will be allowed to drop off/pick up packages at the front door to our office. We will have signage in the corridor identifying the drop off area.
- Consultant and Client meetings in the office will not be allowed until further notice. We will re-evaluate this status throughout Phase 1. All meetings should be via tele-conferencing. We encourage the use of web cams to continue team synergy.

## REMOTE WORKING CAPABILITIES

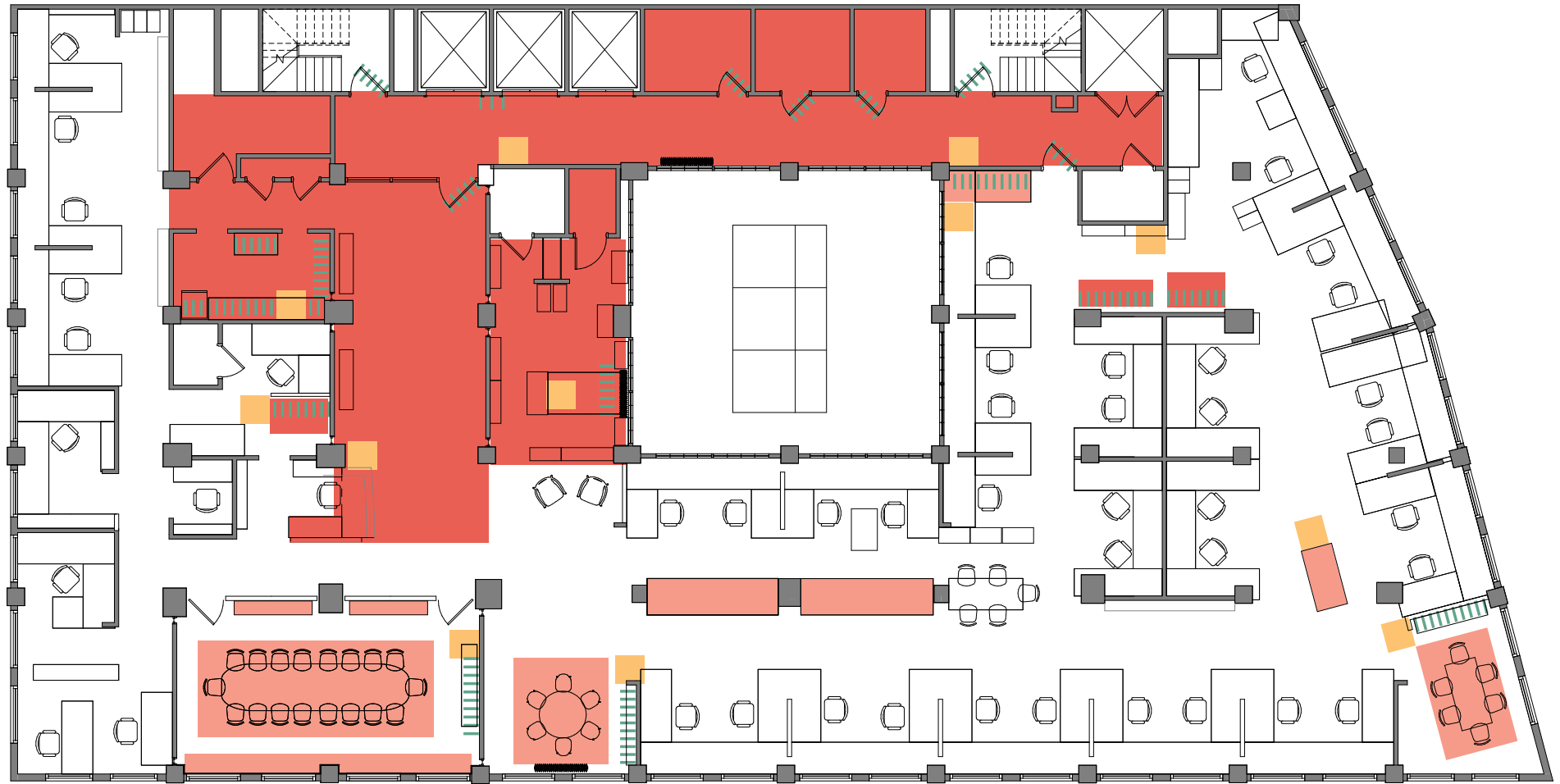
MDS utilizes a range of software programs that enable staff to perform their work outside of the office. All staff members have access to their computers, programs and files and are available for tele- and web-based conferencing and continued collaboration among team members, clients and consultants. The firm continually looks for opportunities to integrate new technologies and software programs that enhance teamwork and deliver exceptional client service.

## STAFF SURVEY

In April 2020, MDS conducted a survey to better understand our staff's experience of working from home, technology use, and concerns for returning to the workplace. The results of this survey are included in this report. This is part of an ongoing dialogue to understand our employees' needs and concerns for returning to the workplace.

## WORKPLACE ANALYSIS

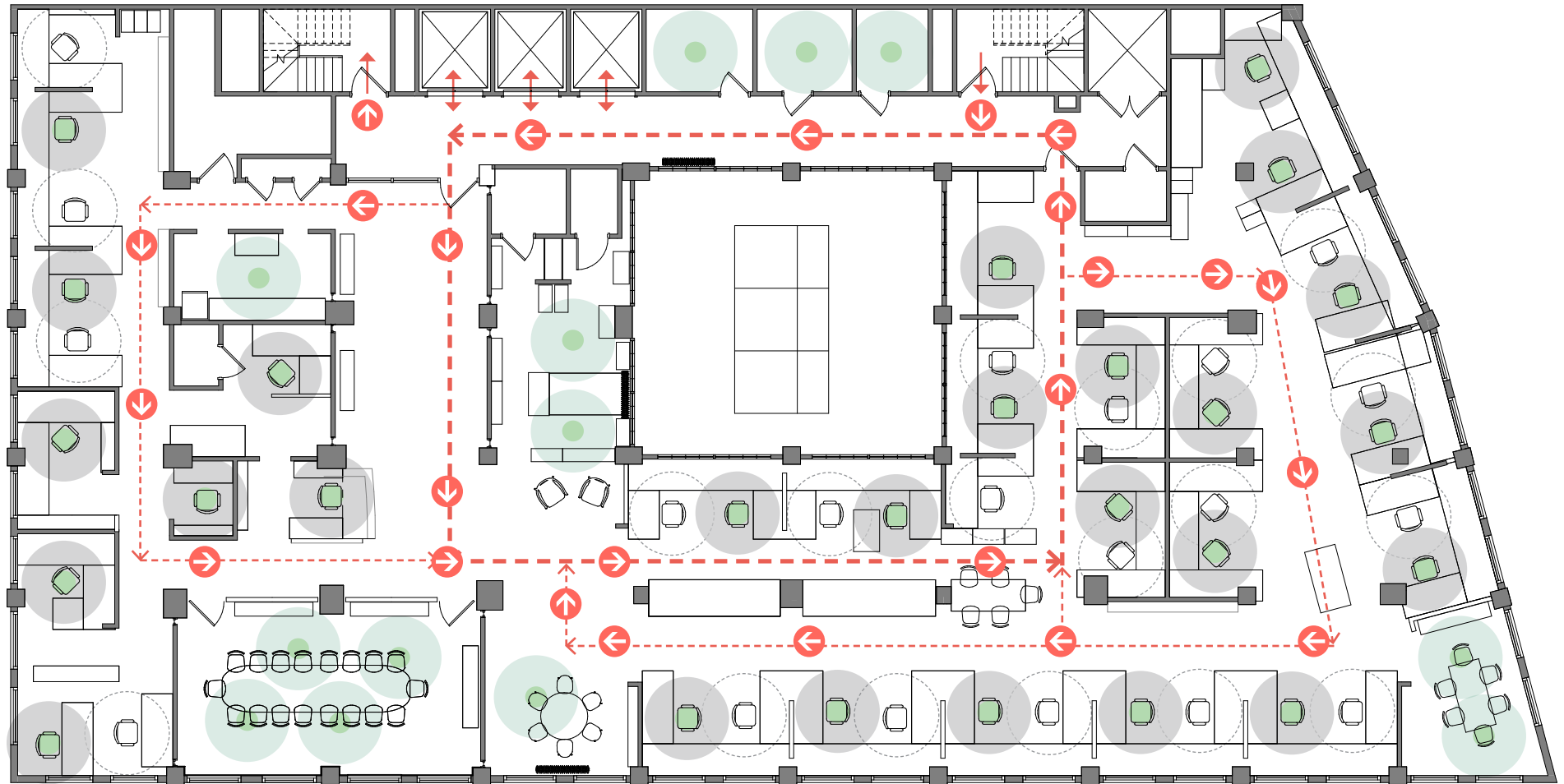
# high risk areas



-  high risk area
-  medium risk area
-  sanitization station
-  high touch device

## WORKPLACE ANALYSIS

# capacity + travel patterns



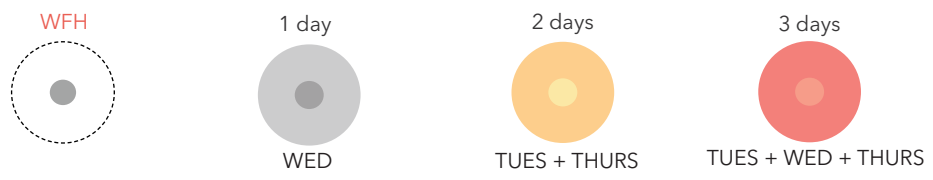
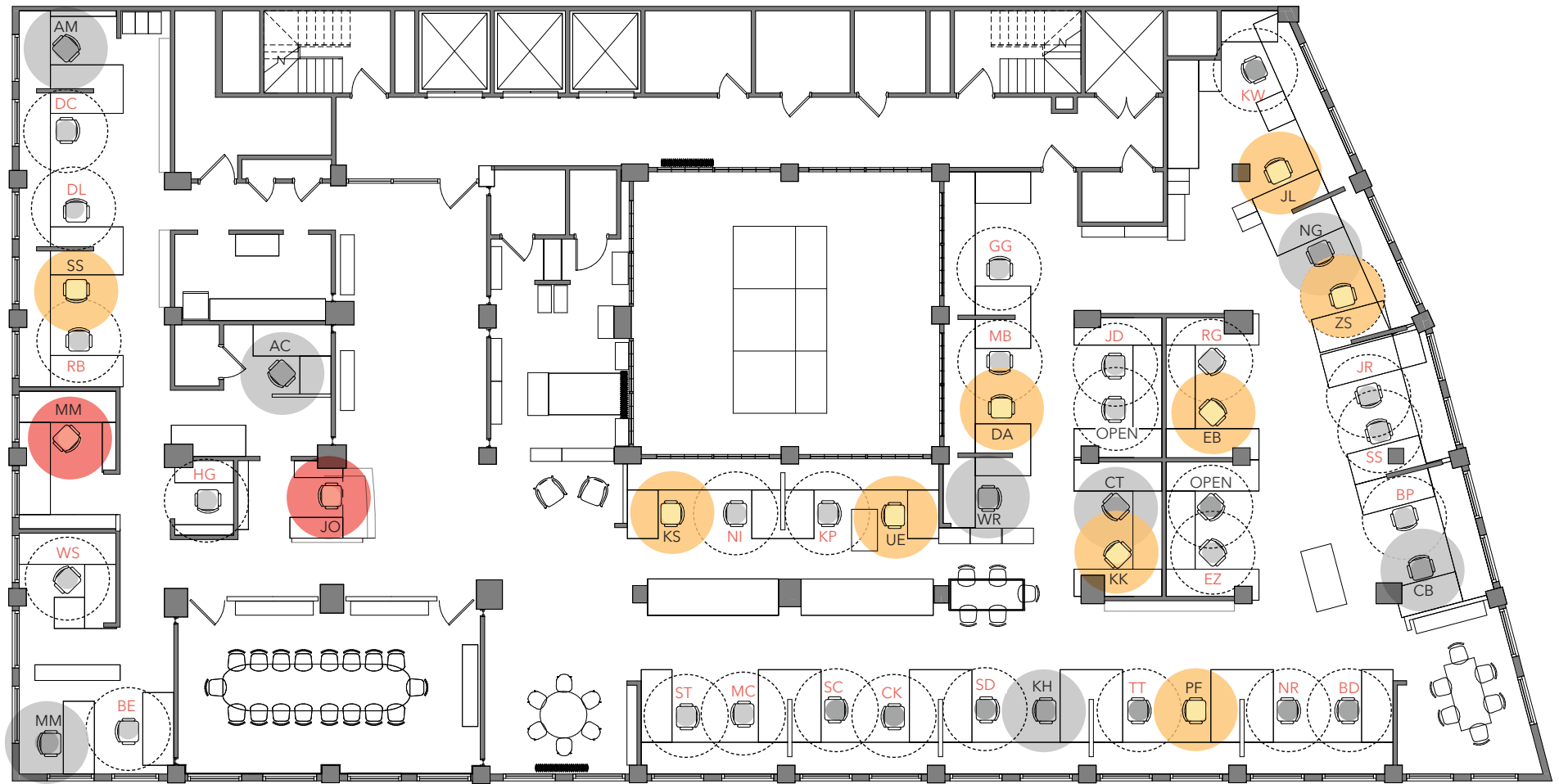
### CAPACITY SUMMARY

- workstations before = 46 / after = 26
- main conference room before = 32 / after = 4
- kitchen before = 5 / after = 1
- toilet rooms before = 5 / after = 3



# WORKPLACE ANALYSIS

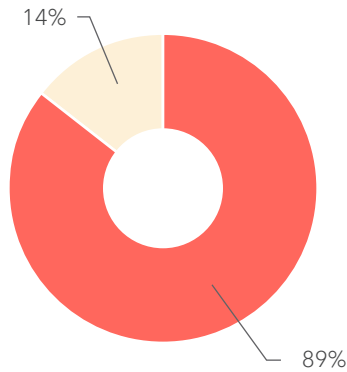
## phase one occupancy schedule (7.2.2020 – TBD)



APRIL 2020 STAFF SURVEY

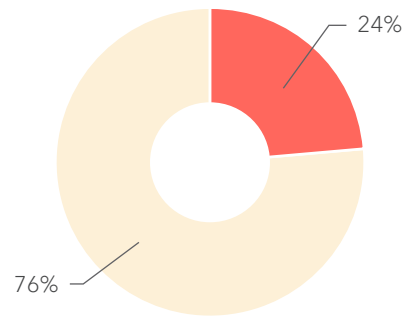
# working from home experience

While working from home, do you have a private space to work effectively?



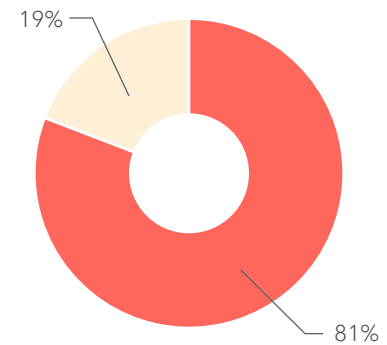
● Yes	36
● No	6

Do you have any personal considerations (family caregiving, kids home from school...) that make it difficult to work from home effectively?



● Yes	10
● No	32

Do you have the technology and/or support equipment needed to do your work as if you were in the office?



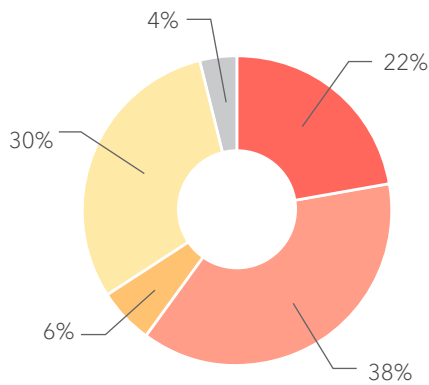
● Yes	34
● No	8

\* staff indicated printers, second monitors or larger monitors at home would be helpful

APRIL 2020 STAFF SURVEY

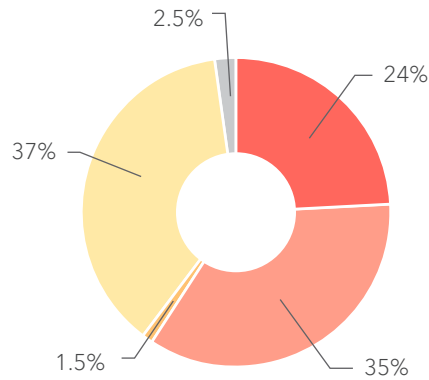
# communication + collaboration tools

For **project-specific communications**, which software programs/apps have been most useful to you while working remotely?



Teams	23
GoToMeeting	39
Zoom	6
Outlook	31
Other	4

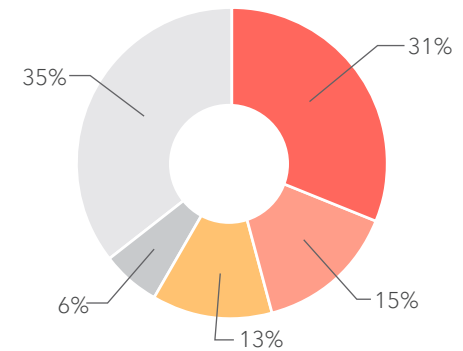
For **firm-wide communications**, which software programs/apps have been most useful to you while working remotely?



Teams	22
GoToMeeting	23
Zoom	1
Outlook	34
Other	2

\* staff indicated weekly office meetings were helpful for feeling connected

Could you use more training on any software programs/apps? If so, which one(s)?



Teams	15
GoToMeeting	7
Zoom	6
Outlook	0
Other	3
None	17

# returning to the workplace

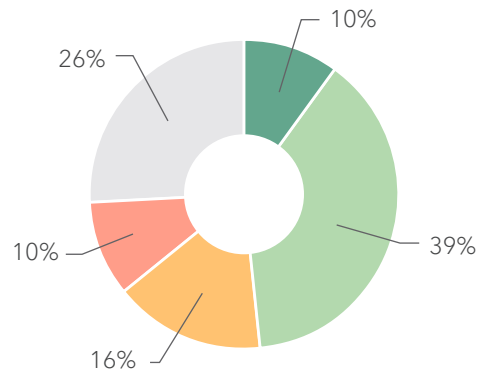
What are the circumstances or activities that require you to be in the office?



APRIL 2020 STAFF SURVEY

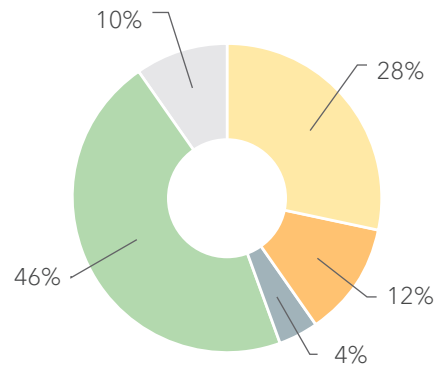
# returning to the workplace

As we begin developing a plan for returning to the office, would you prefer to:



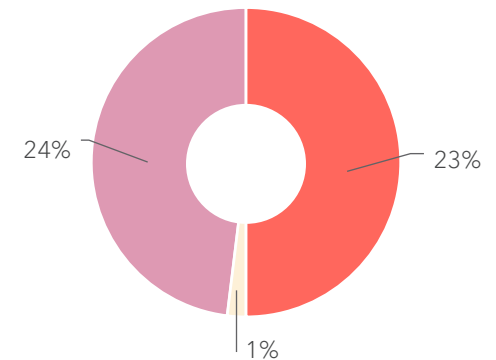
Work remotely indefinitely	7
Come into the office a couple of days a week	27
Come into the office during certain times (mornings or afternoons only)	11
Work in the office as much as possible	7
Other	18

If we need to develop a in-office work schedule to limit the number of people in the office at a time, would you prefer to work: (select all that apply)



Mornings	21
Afternoons	9
Off-hours and/or weekends	3
Certain days, staggered with other staff	34
Other	7

Do you have means to get to the office **without** using public transportation?



Yes	24
No	1
It depends	23

\* alternative transportation options included biking, driving personal cars and carpooling; staff expressed concern about biking during inclement weather and affording parking

# returning to the workplace

What other questions or concerns do you have about working remotely or returning to the office?



# PHASED APPROACH timeline



**MARCH 17, 2020**

All staff members began working remotely following mandatory office closures. While working from home, all staff have access to their computer, programs and files and are available for tele-and web-based conferencing.



**JUNE 2, 2020**

MDS's office reopened with increased safety measures. A staggered work schedule was established to limit the number of employees in the workplace and maintain proper physical distancing.

Employees with at-risk conditions and those with family members with at-risk conditions continued to work from home.

Construction Administration services resumed with increased safety measures.



**TBD**

MDS will maintain a flexible workplace approach until it has been deemed appropriate to resume normal business practices. All strategies are subject to change.



## Does your business, institution or school need assistance planning for a return to operations with increased safety protocols?

MDS is available to help optimize the process of returning to places of business, research, and education and resuming regular activities with increased safety measures.

Contact Amy MacKrell, Principal  
[amackrell@mds-bos.com](mailto:amackrell@mds-bos.com)



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MDS is a Women Business Enterprise (WBE)

## ABOUT MDS ARCHITECTS

MDS/Miller Dyer Spears is an architecture, planning and interior design firm based in Boston. Working with institutions, schools, public agencies, developers, and communities, we specialize in a range of project types that foster innovation, learning, creativity and wellness. We were founded in 1993 and are proud of the many long-standing relationships we have developed with our clients, many of whom we have served for decades.

Our talented team includes accredited professionals in LEED, WELL and Evidence-Based Design, in addition to Specifications Writers, Certified Documents Technologists, and a range of technical architects who bring third-party oversight and quality assurance to our projects.