DIVERSITY & FLEXIBILITY ALLIANCE

Pulse Poll: COVID-19 & Reentry

Return to Office Survey Results, Analysis, and Alliance Recommendations for Moving Forward

ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The Diversity & Flexibility Alliance is a think tank dedicated to creating work environments centered on inclusion and innovative thought leadership. The Alliance provides practical solutions that increase organizational effectiveness and create high performance cultures that advance diversity and flexibility to attract and retain top talent. More information about the Alliance can be found at dfalliance.com.

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

On behalf of the Diversity & Flexibility Alliance, I am pleased to present the results of our ***Pulse Poll: COVID-19 and Reentry*** consisting of responses from **34 organizations**. We strive to help organizations utilize workplace flexibility to foster their productivity, business continuity, talent management, and diversity and inclusion goals – during this unprecedented time and beyond. This study uncovers important data and trends about the approach organizations plan to take during this initial reopening phase.

There were several noteworthy findings, including:

- **Many organizations are providing important resources and support to employees to help them succeed**. More than a majority of respondents have written guidelines covering remote work, employee conduct, and safety/hygiene which will help clarify expectations and limitations. The vast majority (85.3%) have a task force focused on reentry and nearly two-thirds of these task forces include a Diversity & Inclusion professional. This is the right way to start the process and align with our recommendations. A number of organizations are also committed to launching trainings (successfully working remotely, effectively leading remote teams, and addressing unconscious bias), gathering feedback (surveys/check-in meetings), and providing important resources (mental health counseling, technology, and paid leave) to support their employees.

- **Despite the clear majority of respondents having a D&I professional on their reentry task force, more organizations need to make inclusion a priority.** While a significant share of participants will allow *all* of their employees to work remotely (35.3%) and will use a reason-neutral process to determine who can work remotely (44.1%), too many organizations are still limiting which employees can work remotely based upon their function and/or their risk level. During this hybrid stage (i.e. phase prior to vaccine and complete reopening of schools), we urge organizations to think creatively (i.e. reassign roles for this interim period) and offer remote work to *all* employees without needing to provide a reason.

- **Even though the vast majority of respondents have a task force focused on reentry, many organizations are still unsure about several key aspects of the initial reopening phase.** The study showed that a significant share of participants are still unsure about how long employees can work remotely (70.6%), which employees can work remotely (26.5%), whether reason-neutrality will be applied regarding remote work (35.3%), and which trainings will be launched to support employees (50%). Organizations should commit to and communicate these key decisions early on so the reentry process is consistent, fair, and as seamless as possible. Organizations can always caveat their practices by imposing minimum time periods or setting specific dates/milestones when decisions will be reconsidered.

We recognize organizations' varied efforts to support their employees during this time. However, organizations should prioritize inclusion and reduce gaps between employees in their policies,

practices, and guidelines. Organizations also should make clear decisions on key aspects of reopening to make this process as smooth and as fair as possible. This report has specific guidance on implementing comprehensive and inclusive reopening practices through a number of the Alliance's *Action Steps* (member-exclusive, monthly briefs that highlight best practices focus on organizational solution or individual strategies related to diversity and flexible work).

In the coming months, we will be providing our members with resources to help them navigate through reentry challenges. Many thanks to the firms and corporations, including our members, who participated in this study, and we invite more organizations to participate in this effort in the future. Join the Alliance today by contacting me at manar@dfalliance.com to implement innovative solutions to foster diversity and flexibility in your organization during this crisis and beyond.

Warmest regards,

Manar Morales
President & CEO

METHODOLOGY

An invitation to participate in our pulse poll was sent to all Diversity & Flexibility Alliance (the "Alliance") members and other major organizations. Individuals at firms and corporations were also encouraged to participate in the pulse poll via social media posts. Between May 14, 2020 through June 5, 2020, **34 organizations** completed our pulse poll.

Results are summarized through tables, figures, and natural language. A question may not be represented if the data was not statistically reliable. Given that not all organizations responded to each question, figures representing the number of organizations (i.e., the sample size applicable in the particular calculation) appear either in a parenthetical next to the descriptive text or in the accompanying graphic.

Of the 34 participating organizations, the vast majority (32 of 34, or 94.1%) are law firms. The remaining two organizations are a technology company and a consulting company. Of the 32 participating law firms,

- 71.9% (23 of 32) are in the Am Law 200 and 25% (8 of 32) are in the Am Law 100 (note that firms included in the Am Law 100 are also included in the Am Law 200);

- 68.8% (22 of 32) are U.S. based (only U.S. offices), 28.1% (9 of 32) are global (at least one U.S. and one international office), and 3.1% (1 of 32) are international (only international office(s)); and

- 37.5% (12 of 32) have more than 450 attorneys, 18.7% (6 of 32) have between 250-450 attorneys, 34.4% (11 of 32) have between 100-251 attorneys, and 9.4% (3 of 32) have less than 100 attorneys.

Multiple characteristics of the data are presented when there are meaningful differences due to the range in size and characteristics of the participant organizations. For some items, summary statistics may include percentages. Due to rounding and other factors, frequencies of responses may not total 100%.

DETAILED RESULTS

Figure 1. What period of time are employees allowed to work remotely after offices reopen? (n=34)

The vast majority of participants (70.6%, or 24 of 34) responded they are unsure. Nearly 15% (14.7%, or 5 of 34) responded that remote work would be allowed only on a case-by-case basis or through their existing flexible work policy. Only a small share has determined the actual period of time employees can work remotely (5.9%, or 2 of 34, will allow remote work for 1-3 months; 2.9%, or 1 of 34, will allow remote work for 6-12 months; and 5.9%, or 2 of 34, will allow remote work for 18 months or greater).

ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance strongly recommends that organizations allow employees to work remotely during this hybrid stage (i.e. phase prior to vaccine and complete reopening of schools), and to clearly communicate this message. This way, organizations can support their employees since there is still a great deal of upheaval for many (i.e. lack of childcare/eldercare; vulnerability of elderly relatives; public transportation exposure). See our Action Step, *Organizational Guidelines to Bringing Your Workforce Back to the Office*, for further guidance on this topic.

**Figure 2.   Which employees, if any, will be allowed to work remotely after offices reopen? (n=34)**

The results to this question were mixed. While more than one-third (12 of 34) responded that all employees will be allowed to work remotely, 29.4% (10 of 34) responded that only employees whose function allows for remote work can do so. Nine out of 34 (or 26.5%) responded they are unsure, and 8.8% (3 of 34) responded that only certain professionals can work remotely. Of the three participants responding that only certain professionals can work remotely, all indicated these professionals would include at-risk/vulnerable workers and/or employees who can perform duties remotely.

Which Employees Will Be Allowed to Work Remotely?

- 35.3%
- 26.5%
- 8.8%
- 29.4%

■ **All Employees**
■ **N/A Unsure**
■ **Only Certain Professionals**
■ **Only Employees Whose Function Allows for Remote Work**
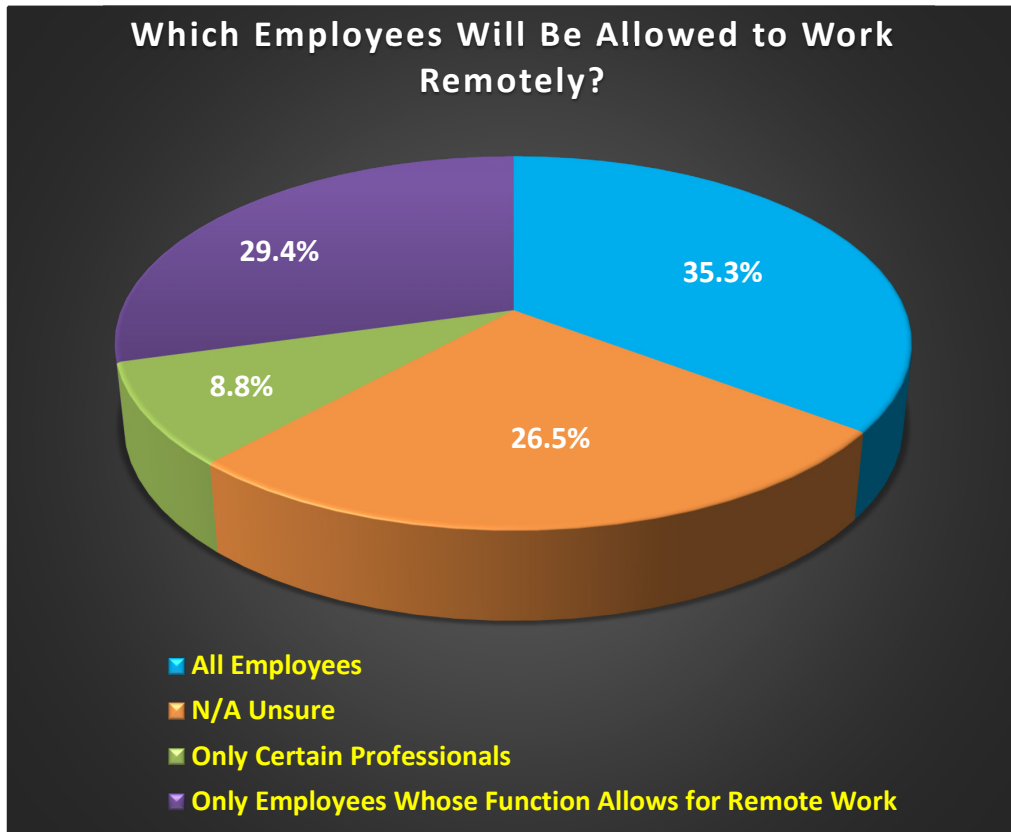
ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance strongly recommends that organizations allow _all_ employees to work remotely during this hybrid stage (i.e. phase prior to vaccine and complete reopening of schools). By allowing all employees to work remotely during this hybrid phase, organizations will promote inclusion, reduce unwanted attrition, and lower stress levels since a great deal of uncertainty still exists. For employees who traditionally need to be in the office due to their function, organizations should consider reassigning their roles during this hybrid phase. Our Action Step, _Truly Inclusive Flex & Leave Policies Must Include Staff,_ discusses the business justification for closing the benefits gap between attorneys and staff and ways to practically accomplish this goal. This is more relevant than ever during the hybrid stage.

Figure 3. **If employees are allowed to work remotely for a certain period of time after offices reopen, is this policy/practice reason-neutral (i.e. employees do not need to specify a reason for wanting to work remotely for this period)? (n=34)**

While the plurality of participants (44.1%, 15 of 34) responded "Yes," a significant minority of participants responded "No" (20.6%, or 7 of 34) and "Unsure" (35.3%, or 12 of 34).

Is Remote Work Allowed Through Reason-Neutral Process?

35.3% 44.1% 20.6%

Yes   No   Unsure
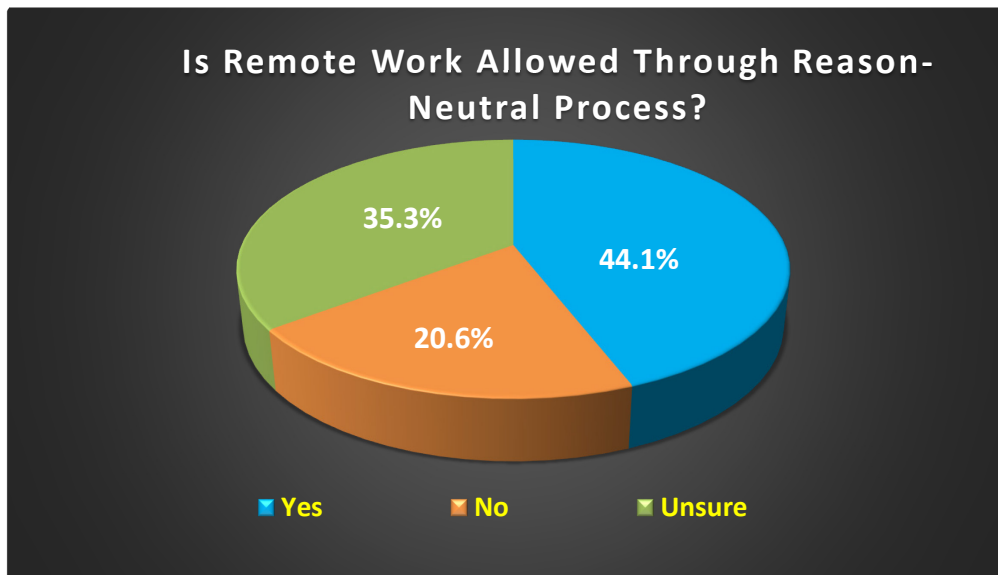
ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: We strongly encourage organizations to allow employees to continue to work remotely during this hybrid stage (i.e. phase prior to vaccine and complete reopening of schools), without providing a reason for doing so. This way, organizations support their employees when numerous factors may make it hard for employees to come into the office (i.e. lack of childcare/eldercare; anxiety; preexisting conditions). See our Action Step, _Organizational Guidelines to Bringing Your Workforce Back to the Office_, for further guidance on this topic.

Figure 4. **Does your organization have written guidelines covering remote work, employee conduct and/or safety and hygiene during reentry specifically? (check all that apply). For purposes of this question, these written guidelines should be specific to COVID-19 and reentry (i.e. does not include general remote work and human resources policies). (n= 34)**

More than a majority have written guidelines covering remote work, employee conduct, and safety and hygiene. More than half (52.9%, or 18 of 34) indicated they have written guidelines covering remote work. More than two-thirds (67.6%, or 23 of 34) indicated they have written guidelines covering employee conduct. The vast majority, 76.5%, or 26 of 34, indicated they have written guidelines covering safety and hygiene. Only 11.8% (4 of 34) indicated they have no written guidelines covering remote work, employee conduct, or safety and hygiene.

Written Guidelines

- Safety Hygiene — 26
- Employee Conduct — 23
- Remote Work — 18
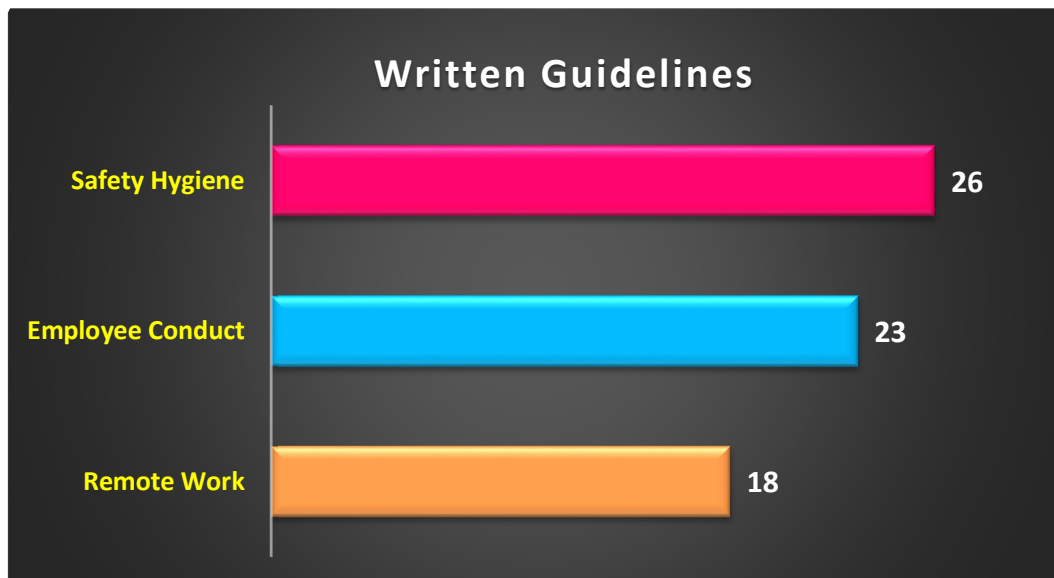
ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: During this hybrid phase, organizations should provide interim guidelines regarding remote work, employee conduct and safety/hygiene. Policies that govern these areas during "normal" times will not address all concerns during this hybrid phase. For this reason, organizations should create written, interim guidelines and should clearly communicate them to employees.

**Figure 5. Does your organization have a task force focused on reentry? (n=34)**

Of the 34 participants, 85.3% (29 of 34), responded "Yes." Only 8.8% (3 of 34) responded "No," and 5.9% (2 of 34) responded "Other." Of those responding "Other," one indicated it is being handled by management/office managing partners and another indicated that a Human Resources leader is drafting a plan.

Does Your Organization Have a Task Force?

- Yes — 85.3%
- No — 8.8%
- Other — 5.9%

ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: A task force focused on reentry is important to make sure the reopening process is consistent, comprehensive, and as seamless as possible. As this initial reopening phase involves many complicated issues, including safety and hygiene considerations and talent management matters, it is important for a task force to think through the range of challenges and address them as best as possible.

Figure 6.   If you have a task force focused on reentry, is a Diversity & Inclusion and/or talent professional included on the task force? (n=29)

Nearly two-thirds (62.1%, or 18 of 29) responded "Yes." Just under 30% (27.6%, or 8 of 29) responded "No" and 10.3% (3 of 29) responded "Other." Of the three participants responding "Other," two indicated that D&I and/or talent professionals provide input.

Is a D&I Professional on the Task Force?

10.3%
27.6%
62.1%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Other
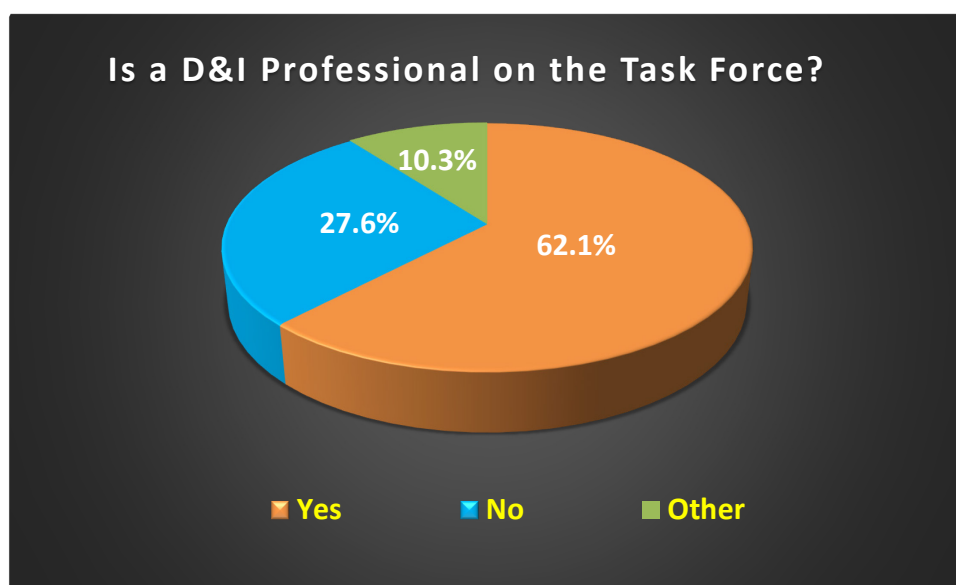
ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance strongly encourages all organizations to include D&I professionals on their reentry task force. Without their input, organizations are likely missing key employee perspectives including health/mental health challenges, individual concerns, and viewpoints from those disproportionately impacted.

Figure 7.   What trainings will you be launching to help employees during this reentry period? (Please check all that apply)? (n=34)

A significant share are planning on launching the following trainings: Best Practices for Working Remotely (38.2%, or 13 of 34), Best Practices for Leading Remote Teams (32.4%, or 11 of 34), and Unconscious Bias (23.5%, or 8 of 34). Only a small number (3 of 34, or 8.8%) indicated they will have no trainings to support reentry. However, half of the participants (17 of 34) are still unsure about some and/or all of the trainings they will launch to support reentry.

Other trainings/programs that participants indicated they will launch include: Reopening/Safety (five organizations); Wellness/Mental Health (three organizations); Caregiving (two organizations); Leadership (three organizations); and Business Development (one organization).
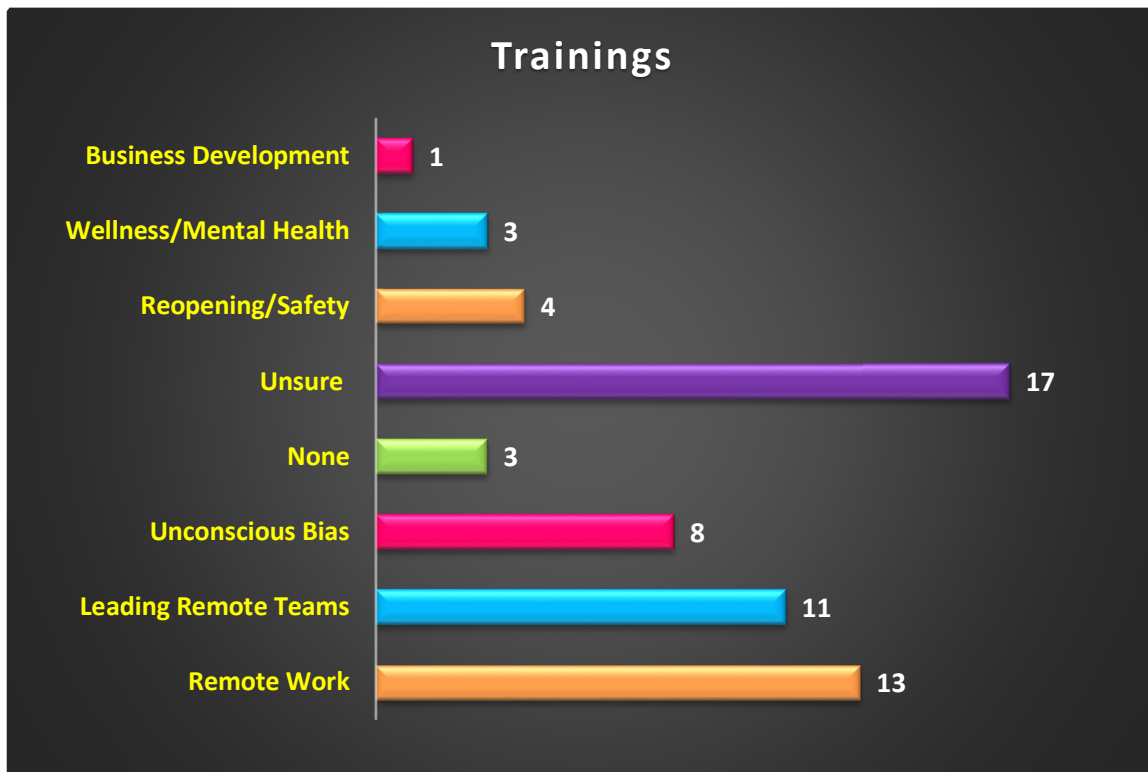
ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance strongly recommends providing employees with training to support them and help them succeed during this hybrid stage. Organizations need to provide employees/leaders with training around successfully working remotely, effectively leading remote teams, and addressing unconscious bias. This way, organizations raise awareness of common pitfalls, set consistent expectations, and provide best practices on ways to succeed in this environment. Members can access our *Business Continuity, Success (and Sanity) During COVID-19 Telecommuting* and *Back to the Office: Reentry Strategies Under COVID-19* webinar recordings and leverage them for training. In addition, our Action Steps, *Telecommuters Guide to Working Remotely*, *Making Business Development A Priority For Flex or Reduced Hours Attorneys*, and *Individual Strategies For Remote Team Success* provide best practices for flex employees. And our Action Steps, *Delivering Feedback Effectively*, *Five Mistakes Supervisors Make When Evaluating Flexible Schedule Associates*, *Reducing Bias in Evaluations*, and *Seven Strategies for Managing Remote Teams*, provide best practices for supervisors when managing flex employees. These can be used as a starting point for developing educational programs during this hybrid stage.

Figure 8. **How will you gather feedback from employees to understand their experiences during COVID-19 and/or reentry? (n=34)**

Of the 34 participants, 58.8% (20 of 34) will survey; 55.9% (19 of 34) will conduct check-in meetings; 20.6% (7 of 34) will conduct focus groups; 38.2% (13 of 34) will monitor work allocation; 38.2% (13 of 34) will review utilization/productivity reports; and 20.6% (7 of 34) are unsure of how they will gather feedback.
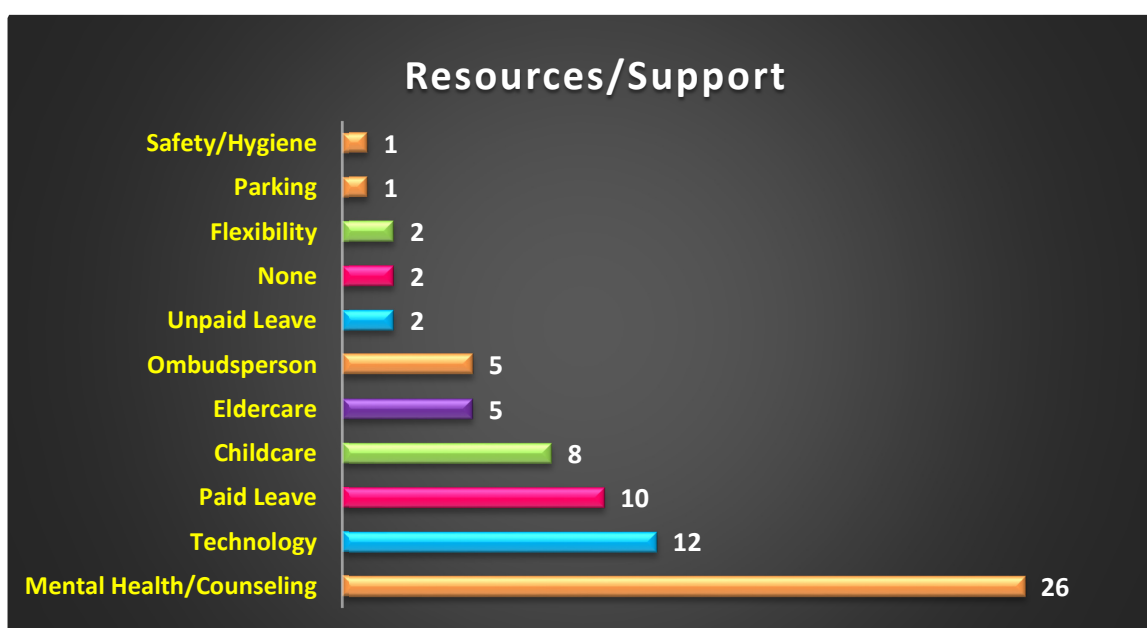
Other ways participants mentioned gathering feedback included: town halls (two organizations); and feedback from committees/management (two organizations).

Gathering Feedback

Category	Value
Committee/Management Feedback	2
Town Halls	2
Unsure	7
Review Utilization	13
Monitor Work Allocation	13
Focus Groups	7
Check-In Meetings	19
Survey	20

ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance strongly recommends collecting feedback and data to understand what worked and what didn't regarding business continuity and remote work during this hybrid phase. By doing so, organizations can resolve issues and support employees, including diverse employees and caregivers who will likely face increased bias during this phase. Collecting data is also important to make the business case for updating your flexible work and business continuity policies in the future. See our Action Step, *Monitor & Measure*, for useful ways to gather data.

Figure 9. **What kinds of support/resources will your organization offer during this time? Check all that apply. Note that for purposes of this question, the term "additional" means resources, support and/or leave that is separate and greater than something the organization typically provides.? (n=34)**
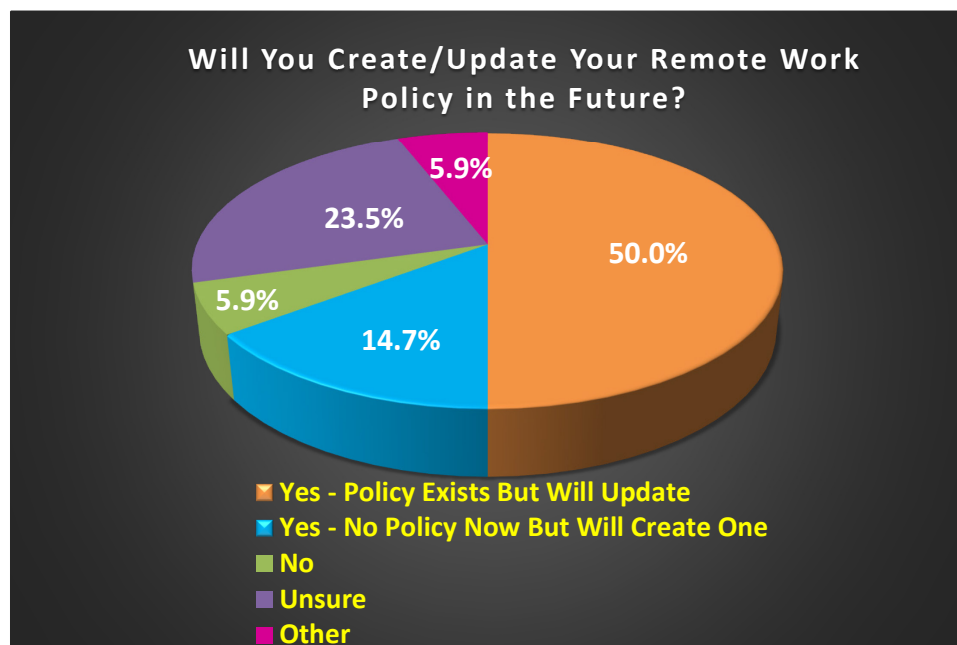
The vast majority will offer mental health/counseling resources (76.5%, or 26 of 34). More than a third (35.3%, or 12 of 34) will offer a technology stipend and/or additional technology resources. Nearly 30% (29.4, or 10 of 34) will offer additional paid leave. Nearly a quarter (23.5%, or 8 of 34) will offer a childcare stipend and/or additional childcare resources. A significant share (14.7%, 5 of 34) will offer an eldercare stipend and/or additional eldercare resources and have an ombudsperson. A few (5.9%, or 2 of 34) will offer additional unpaid leave. Only 5.9%, 2 of 34, will provide no resources. Other support/resources mentioned included: flexibility (two organizations); parking (one organization); and safety/hygiene (one organization).

Resources/Support

Category	Value
Safety/Hygiene	1
Parking	1
Flexibility	2
None	2
Unpaid Leave	2
Ombudsperson	5
Eldercare	5
Childcare	8
Paid Leave	10
Technology	12
Mental Health/Counseling	26

ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance recommends offering *and* communicating resources/support available during this time to employees. Carefully consider the types of support and resources that employees may need now. Leadership should coordinate with the IT department to understand what worked and what didn't with technology resources during the pandemic and what additional technology resources may be necessary moving forward. Leadership should also consider whether employees need technology allowances or stipends to continue to be as productive as possible. Since many employees are faced with school and care center closures, think through childcare and eldercare support, such as providing a paid subscription or stipend for care sourcing platforms (i.e. Care.com, Sittercity.com, UrbanSitter.com, etc.) to help defray costs. Organizations should also create an ombudsperson (if they do not have one already) to resolve unconscious bias and employee concerns. It's also helpful for human resources, talent development and D&I professionals to discuss existing resources and organizational support that can be leveraged from Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and membership organizations. For further suggestions on maximizing/leveraging your resources, review our Action Step, *Maximizing & Coordinating Existing Resources*.

More than two-thirds (64.7%, or 22 of 34) responded "Yes" (of which 50%, or 17 of 34, have a remote work policy in place but are planning on updating it, and 14.7%, or 5 of 34, do not have a remote work policy in place but are planning on creating one). Only 5.9%, or 2 of 34, responded "No" (these two organizations indicated they have a remote work policy in place and are not planning on updating it in the future). Nearly one-quarter (23.5%, 8 of 34) responded they are unsure. The remaining 5.9% (2 of 34) responded "Other" and indicated they may and/or should consider updating their policy in the future.

Will You Create/Update Your Remote Work Policy in the Future?

- ■ Yes - Policy Exists But Will Update — 50.0%
- ■ Yes - No Policy Now But Will Create One — 14.7%
- ■ No — 5.9%
- ■ Unsure — 23.5%
- ■ Other — 5.9%

ALLIANCE GUIDANCE: The Alliance recommends that all organizations, whether or not you currently have a flexible work policy in place, should revisit their flexible work policies after the crisis ends. We do not recommend creating/revamping flexible work policies during this hybrid stage as too many exceptions still exist. During this hybrid phase, organizations should provide interim guidelines regarding remote work, employee conduct, and safety and hygiene, and should also gather feedback. After the crisis ends, organizations should think through what worked and what didn't regarding flexible work in order to create or revamp flexible work policies. When creating/updating flexible work policies in the future, remember to use your member-exclusive benefits: Resource Library, Strategy Calls, Policy Reviews, Advisory Hours and Signature Seminars. As a starting point, review the following Action Steps: *Working Outside the Box: Tips for Establishing a Telecommuting Policy*, *Formalizing Your Full-Time Flex Program*, and *Implementation Essentials for Flexibility Program*.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing findings demonstrate promising support structures to help employees succeed during the reopening phase, but also uncover mixed results in terms of inclusion for all employees and decisiveness on key reentry practices. We encourage organizations to make and communicate decisions on important reopening matters as soon as possible. We also urge organizations to make their reopening policies/practices as inclusive as possible.

Thank you to our members and all participating organizations in this pulse poll. Together, we will make thoughtful and comprehensive decisions and get through this crisis and shape the future of work.

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