

# National Endowment for the Humanities COVID-19 Interim Year FAQs

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## Contents

General FAQs .....	1
Interim Building Reopening .....	3
Remote Work and Telework .....	6
Federal Guidance .....	9
Vaccinations .....	9
Workplace Safety.....	10

## General FAQs

- **I am not ready to return to the building right now. Can I continue to work remotely?**

Yes. During a one-year interim period (Nov 1, 2021-October 31, 2022), staff will have maximum flexibility. All non-essential staff will be able to work remotely if they choose to for the duration of the year.

- **I am ready to return to the building in some capacity. Will I be able to?**

Yes. The current plan is for the building to re-open in a limited capacity beginning on May 1, 2022. The reopening process will proceed as follows:

- Six weeks before the re-opening date, staff will be provided with detailed information about current CDC guidelines and NEH safety policies for the safe reopening of the office. By April 15, 2022, all staff members will be required to submit a form indicating their preference to remain in remote/telework status or to work up to two days each week in the building.
  - Two weeks before the reopening date, the agency will re-evaluate the pandemic environment to determine whether a safe reopening is possible. NEH staff who have submitted a return to building request will be provided with a work schedule as well as information about masking and social distancing requirements.
  - Final approval will be at the discretion of the Director of Administrative Services and HR Director and will also depend on space availability and collective bargaining agreement requirements. Employees hired during the pandemic and who reside outside of the Washington, DC commuting area will be responsible for their own relocation costs if they would like to come into the building.
- **What information will I need to make a request to return to work in the building, or continue teleworking or working remotely?**

Assuming that the CDC and local guidelines permit reopening, staff will be required to fill out an online form by April 1, 2022, indicating their interest in returning to the building, continuing teleworking, or working remotely.

Information in this form will likely include:

- Their current vaccination status (including boosters, if applicable).
- A statement indicating their willingness to follow regulations for building capacity, masking, and social distancing.
- Their preference to work remotely or to work in the office at a reduced capacity.
- Any preference that they have for which days they will work. Work schedules will need to be coordinated with OHR, ASO, and supervisors to ensure safety protocols are met.

- **I'd like to work in the building, but on a modified schedule. For example, could I work half a day in the office and half a day from home to avoid peak commuting hours?**

Yes. Staff will have the option for maximum flexibility, which means the option to arrange for a partial workday in the office mixed with telework. Working a part of one day in the office will count as one of the two in-office allotted days.

- **What if I requested to work in the building, but my circumstances have changed and I would now prefer to return to full-time remote or telework status?**

If you no longer want to work in the building and wish to revert to telework or full-time remote status, you must inform the agency of your plans via an online form.

- **If I chose to work remotely or as a teleworker during the interim period, what if I change my mind and want to return to the building?**

Employees who want to come into the building will need to advise their supervisor of changes. If staff who are fully remote or fully teleworking want to return to the building in a part-time capacity, they may request to do so by the 15th of the month using the online request form. Their status will be updated by the last Friday of the month, depending on building capacity and social distancing. Final approval will be at the discretion of HR, ASO, and OIRM.

- **Will the agency require travel during the interim period?**

Panels and project directors' meetings will remain virtual for the entire interim period (November 1, 2021 to October 31, 2022). All other non-essential work-related travel for NEH staff will remain on hold through at least April 30, 2022, to protect the safety of NEH staff and their families.

NEH leadership will allow NEH staff to travel from May 1, 2022, to October 31, 2022, for conferences, speaking engagements, site visits, and other events that meet enhanced safety criteria determined by the Health and Safety COVID-19 Response Team.

NEH leadership will provide additional guidance on this policy, including information on NEH-hosted events, on or before April 1, 2022.

- **What will happen in the case that there are changes in the pandemic that compromise staff safety?**

NEH will continue to keep up with current state, local and federal updates concerning the pandemic and follow CDC and federal requirements and guidance. This information will be shared with the staff as necessary. Additionally, NEH is a member of the Constitution Center Facilities Security Committee (FSC) and will share relevant information from that group accordingly.

If in-office work is no longer safe for employees, the Chairman, Senior Deputy Chairman, or a designee will make a final decision regarding the operating status of the agency, and this information will be communicated to staff via the Vital Link Emergency Notification system

and/or the NEH's email system.

- **Will employees hired during the pandemic be able to work in the building?**

Full time, permanent employees hired during the pandemic who are currently on remote telework will be able to request to work in the office. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Other employees, such as interns or temporary staff, will not work in the building but will continue in a virtual work status.

- **Where can I learn more about what information employers can collect from workers about COVID-19?**

Employers and workers can visit the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's COVID-19 webpage](#) and frequently asked questions ([available here](#)) to learn more about this topic.

The U.S. Department of Justice also provides information about COVID-19 and the Americans with Disabilities Act ([available here](#)).

- **Where can I learn more about government recommendations during the pandemic?**

Additional information can be found at the pages below:

[CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

[USA.gov/coronavirus](https://www.usa.gov/coronavirus)

<https://www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus>

## Interim Building Reopening

1. **What will be the maximum capacity of NEH's office space?**

NEH will allow staff to return at up to 25% capacity at any one time.

2. **How many days per week will I be able to work in the office?**

During the interim year, approved staff will be able to work up to two days per week in the office. NEH leadership may adjust the number of days permitted in response to changing pandemic conditions and staff needs.

3. **What safety measures will NEH take for employees who will be returning to the building?**

The agency will continue to ensure staff safety by:

### Providing Personal Protective Equipment

Hand sanitizer will be made available in public spaces. Enhanced cleaning will be provided for high touch areas, excluding stairwells. Mask policies will follow local DC guidance. As of this writing, masks are required for vaccinated staff, and mask use will be enforced.

### Maintaining Social Distancing

Workstations will be staggered to ensure safety. Most common rooms and conference rooms will be closed, with the exception of restrooms, kitchens, and lactation areas. Therefore, all meetings should continue to be held via Microsoft Teams until further notice.

### Requiring vaccinations

All federal employees and contractors must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 by November 22, 2021.

### Monitoring the Constitution's Center Ventilation Systems

NEH will continue to ensure that the Constitution Center's (CC) ventilation and air filtration systems currently meet GSA recommendations for maximum safety. As of the date of this policy, the ventilation and air filtration systems are in compliance. GSA has reviewed and approved the CC ventilation system for re-entry.

### Conducting Contact Tracing if necessary

The agency will support the contact tracing programs of local health departments to help identify, track, and manage contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases. In the case that someone working in the Constitution Center contracts COVID-19, NEH will be transparent in communicating relevant information to the workforce consistent with local and federal privacy and confidentiality regulations and laws.

### Encouraging Employees and Contractors to Monitor their Symptoms

If NEH employees, on-site contractors, or visitors are not feeling well, they should not enter the Constitution Center. Any individual who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the workday must immediately isolate, notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace.

#### **4. Will conference rooms, kitchens, lactation rooms, privacy rooms and resting rooms be open during the interim period?**

Restrooms, kitchens, privacy rooms, resting rooms, and lactation rooms will remain open.

#### **5. May supervisors or staff convene meetings in the agency's conference rooms?**

Conference rooms will remain closed, and all official staff meetings or team meetings, whatever their size, must be held via Microsoft Teams.

**6. Will vaccinations and proof of vaccination be required for visitors and contractors once they are allowed in NEH space?**

Yes. Visitors (including contractors) entering the Constitution Center and NEH space will be required to provide information about their vaccination status. The process is as follows:

- NEH will provide visitors with the [Certification of Vaccination form](#) prior to their visiting NEH.
- The agency directs visitors to complete the Certification of Vaccination form and keep it with them during their time in the Constitution Center. Visitors may be asked to show the form in non-NEH space or common areas.
- The agency may email the Certification of Vaccination form to visitors and contractors in advance of arrival or utilize a tool or application to share the form with visitors and enable visitors to easily complete it, but the agency will not maintain Certification of Vaccination forms from visitors.
- For those visitors or contractors who do not have access to email or applications, the form will be available at the guards' desks.
- NEH will not ask visitors for vaccination documentation to verify their attestation.

**7. If my workstation is a cubicle, must I wear a mask at all times while at my desk?**

Yes. Employees working in a cubicle must wear a mask at all times.

**8. Will visitors who are unvaccinated need to wear masks and physically distance from others?**

All visitors, regardless of vaccination status, must wear masks and physically distance from others. Individuals—including onsite contractor employees, visitors, and members of the public who are seeking a public service or benefit—who are not [fully vaccinated](#), or who have declined to provide their vaccination information when requested, must maintain a distance of at least six feet from others at all times, consistent with CDC guidelines, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal and work spaces) and properly wear a mask regardless of community transmission level, consistent with CDC guidelines.

**9. Will staff be allowed to visit other federal agencies in other buildings?**

Federal employees are treated as visitors during their visit to another agency, meaning they need to complete a [Certification of Vaccination form](#). As with other visitors, the employee should keep the form with them during their time onsite at the other agency. If an employee with a reasonable accommodation is not fully vaccinated, they will likely need to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test result within the past 3 days, wear a mask, and practice social distancing, subject to the visited agency's protocols. The NEH will pay the cost of testing should an agency employee visit another federal agency if the agency has approved the visit in advance.

**10. What will ASO do to prepare for the reopening of the building?**

- a. Evaluate Personal Protective Equipment needs.
- b. Evaluate Facility Readiness in the context of the latest pandemic conditions.
- c. Activate Employee Commuting Benefits (Smart Benefits, MTA, VRE), and activate new accounts for new employees.

## Remote Work and Telework

### 1. What does it mean to be a remote employee?

Remote employees are staff members who visit the office with a frequency of less than one day per pay period and are working outside of the Washington, DC Metropolitan commuting area (District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia).

### 2. What does it mean to be a teleworking employee?

Pre-pandemic, teleworking employees were staff members who worked in the building with a frequency of at least one day per pay period. Because of the pandemic, this policy has been revised, and many employees have been teleworking full time without visiting the office on any days during each per pay period.

During the interim period, staff may request to work in the office up to two days per week and telework for the remaining days of the week, or request to continue full-time in their current telework status'.

### 3. Will choosing not to return to the office impact my performance review? What changes in performance evaluation, if any, will the agency be making to accommodate my remote work?

Work as defined will have the same performance expectations and be evaluated against the designated performance standards regardless of where it is performed. NEH will implement telework arrangements as broadly as possible to ensure systems and employees are fully prepared for remote work. Equivalencies will be identified and confirmed in order to ensure that there will be no negative consequences for choosing to work remotely.

For positions that would not typically be telework eligible, division and office leadership are encouraged to work closely with the Office of Human Resources to carefully review position descriptions and ensure their accuracy. Those positions with new defined duties may be assigned new performance standards. Most positions will have the same performance expectations and be evaluated against the designated performance standards.

### 4. During the interim period, I will be living outside of the DMV. Will my salary be adjusted?

During the interim period, all employees' duty location will be assigned to Washington, DC, for purposes of salary.

**5. I'm having trouble with the technology required for teleworking. How can I get support?**

The NEH provides training in the areas of cybersecurity, Microsoft TEAMS, and ethics, as is customary. Cybersecurity and ethics training are provided to all new employees on their first day of employment. Staff who would like additional training should contact the Office of Human Resources for additional information.

If staff need additional assistance with their computer or software, they can call 202-606-8399, or email [help@neh.gov](mailto:help@neh.gov), and OIRM staff will assist either via phone or with remote control software as appropriate. The timeline for addressing user's request will be identical to pre-pandemic operations, e.g., response time will be based on workload and staffing, with response times ranging from mere minutes to an hour. OIRM will assist staff as quickly as possible.

**6. Does NEH provide any office supplies or equipment for staff who are working off-site? How do I make a request for these items?**

Yes, NEH can supply staff with office supplies and equipment for remote workers.

In order to request items, send a detailed work order with your contact information including your address for shipping, along with the products or supplies that is needed so ASO can organize, plan, and complete each request effectively. If a requisition is needed, ASO staff will notify the requestor and route the work order(s) to the appropriate department.

Technical supplies and systems are handled by OIRM.

**7. I am a supervisor. Will NEH provide training or guidance on how best to support my teleworking staff?**

OHR will work closely with supervisors to update position descriptions and provide guidance as necessary to address and evaluate performance. OHR will continue to support management in the efforts of promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workplace. Additionally, OHR will work to promote a collaborative, supportive, and respectful work environment that increases the participation and contribution of all employees. Agency directives will be reviewed and updated to ensure removal of all barriers, discrimination, and intolerance. NEH's goal is to ensure that employees feel included and supported.

OHR will also identify supervisory training opportunities for all management officials whose work involves overseeing employees who are working virtually. Additionally, OHR will identify training opportunities for NEH employees that will support them working successfully in a virtual environment. This training may be deemed mandatory for both supervisors and staff.

**8. I am struggling with the adjustment to teleworking or with the supervision I'm receiving as a teleworking employee. Where can I get support?**

OHR will provide maximum support to supervisors and employees and provide necessary training and recommendations to promote fair treatment; equal access to opportunities; teamwork and collaboration; innovation and creativity; organizational flexibility, responsiveness and agility; collaborative conflict resolution; and leadership's commitment to



*NEH COVID-19 Interim Year FAQs*

diversity at all levels of the agency. Additionally, OHR will leverage its contract with the Federal Occupational Health to offer Employee Assistance Program benefits to all employees. Please call OHR at (202) 606-8415 or email them at [humanresources@neh.gov](mailto:humanresources@neh.gov) for assistance.

## Federal Guidance

The following questions and answers apply to all federal employees and are up-to-date as of November 2, 2021. You can find more information about these questions and more at:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/covidplan/>

<https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus>

## Vaccinations

### **1. What is the latest guidance from the White House on combating COVID-19 moving forward?**

President Biden is implementing a six-pronged, comprehensive national strategy that employs the same science-based approach that was used to successfully combat previous variants of COVID-19 earlier this year. This plan will ensure that we are using every available tool to combat COVID-19 and save even more lives in the months ahead, while also keeping schools open and safe, and protecting our economy from lockdowns and damage.

The six prongs of the plan are:

1. Vaccinating the unvaccinated
2. Further protecting the vaccinated
3. Keeping schools safely open
4. Increasing testing and requiring masking
5. Protecting our economic recovery
6. Improving care for those with COVID-19

### **2. How will this national strategy affect federal employees?**

President Biden has signed an Executive Order requiring all federal executive branch workers to be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021, except in limited circumstances where an employee is legally entitled to an accommodation. The agency must work expeditiously so that employees are fully vaccinated as quickly as possible and by no later than November 22, 2021. Employees who are on maximum telework or working remotely are not excused from this requirement.

The President also signed an Executive Order directing that this standard be extended to employees of contractors that do business with the federal government.

### **3. When is a person considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19?**

A person is considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19  $\geq 2$  weeks after receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer and Moderna) or  $\geq 2$  weeks after receipt of the single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. If employees receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, they must receive their second dose by November 8, 2021, in order to be fully vaccinated by November 22.

### **4. Will proof of vaccination be required?**

Yes. Employees will need to submit proof of vaccination through NEH's vax app. Please contact the Office of Human Resources for instructions on how to submit your proof of vaccination documentation if you have not already done so.

**5. What about booster shots? If I'm vaccinated, will I also be required to receive a booster shot? And by when?**

Regulations are forthcoming for booster shots.

**6. What if an employee refuses to get vaccinated?**

Employees covered by Executive Order 14043 who fail to comply with a requirement to be fully vaccinated or provide proof of vaccination and have neither received an exception nor have an exception request under consideration, are in violation of a lawful order. Employees who violate lawful orders are subject to discipline, up to and including termination or removal. Consistent with the Administration's policy, the agency will initiate an enforcement process to work with employees to encourage their compliance.

**7. What are the current regulations for unvaccinated people?**

Individuals who are unvaccinated must wear masks and physically distance from others. Individuals—including employees, onsite contractor employees, visitors, and members of the public who are seeking a public service or benefit—who are not fully vaccinated, or who have declined to provide their vaccination information when requested, must maintain a distance of at least six feet from others at all times, consistent with CDC guidelines, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal and work spaces) and properly wear a mask regardless of community transmission level, consistent with CDC guidelines. [Consistent with CDC guidance](#), those who are not fully vaccinated are advised by the agency to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

### Workplace Safety

Note that this guidance applies only to those employees who are working in the NEH offices.

**8. What are the current recommended best practices that employers should consider to protect workers?**

Best practices include conducting a workplace risk assessment for potential COVID-19 exposure, preparing a response plan, and taking steps to improve ventilation. In areas with substantial or high transmission, employers should provide face coverings for all workers, as appropriate, regardless of vaccination status. Employers can also suggest or require that unvaccinated customers, visitors, or guests wear face coverings in public-facing workplaces such as retail establishments, and that all customers, visitors, or guests wear face coverings in public, indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission. These practices are consistent with CDC's guidance for fully vaccinated people to promote public health and workplace health.

**9. What is the current guidance on face masks in the office?**

OSHA's guidance is consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition to unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers, CDC recommends that even fully vaccinated people wear masks in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission and notes that fully vaccinated people may appropriately choose to wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of level of transmission, particularly for people who are at-risk or have someone in their household who is at-risk or not fully vaccinated. Unless otherwise provided by federal, state, or local requirements, workers who are outdoors may opt not to wear face coverings unless they are at risk, for example, if they are immunocompromised. Regardless, all workers should be supported in

continuing to wear a face covering if they choose, especially in order to safely work closely with other people.

Note that cloth face coverings are not considered personal protective equipment (PPE) and cannot be used in place of respirators when respirators are otherwise required.

Learn more about cloth face coverings on the CDC website.

### **10. If employees wear cloth face coverings, do employers still need to ensure physical distancing measures in the workplace?**

Employers should engage with workers and their representatives to determine how to implement multi-layered interventions to protect unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Appropriate mitigation strategies may include both face coverings for workers *and* the implementation of physical distancing measures for workers in communal areas.

### **11. What is the current guidance for employers when an employee tests positive for COVID-19?**

Workers who test positive for COVID-19 will be notified of their results by their healthcare providers or public health department and will likely be advised to self-isolate or seek medical care.

OSHA recommends that workers tell their supervisors if they have tested positive for COVID-19 so that employers can take steps to protect other workers. Such steps can include cleaning and disinfection and removing or isolating the COVID-19 positive worker (e.g., by allowing that worker to telework). Employers who become aware of a case among their workers should:

- Follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for community-related exposure to someone with known or suspected COVID-19.
- Follow CDC recommendations for when employees can return to work after having COVID-19.
- Follow CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations to protect other employees.

### **12. Is an employer required to notify other employees if a staff member has COVID-19 or tests positive for COVID-19?**

OSHA does not require employers to notify other employees if one of their coworkers gets COVID-19. However, employers must take appropriate steps to protect other workers from exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the workplace. These steps might include specific actions as a result of a confirmed case, such as and removing or isolating the COVID-19 positive worker such as by allowing telework, cleaning and disinfecting the work environment, notifying other workers to monitor themselves for signs/symptoms of COVID-19, or implementing a screening program in the workplace (e.g., for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 among workers).

The CDC Guidance for Business and Employers recommends employers determine which employees may have been exposed to the virus and inform employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace. However, employers should maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the information disclosed and method of disclosure must comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Employers and workers can visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's COVID-19 webpage and frequently asked questions to learn more about this topic.

**13. Would NEH inform staff of a COVID-19 case in the workplace?**

Yes. NEH would notify staff and take the appropriate action.

**14. Would I be able to get tested if I've been exposed to someone with COVID-19 at work?**

Yes. Federal employees who have been exposed to persons with COVID-19 at work should receive diagnostic testing at no cost to the employee. If an agency has in-house testing capabilities (either through an occupational health clinic or through the utilization of contract options), it can provide testing at the worksite; if the agency does not provide testing at the worksite, it has determined a process for employee diagnostic testing and, if necessary, reimbursement for associated expenses borne by the employee.

**15. Can my employer force me to work if I have concerns about COVID-19, including a coworker having tested positive, personal medical concerns, or a high-risk family member at home?**

Generally, your employer may require you to come to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some government emergency orders may affect which businesses can remain open during the pandemic.

Under federal law, you are entitled to a safe workplace. Your employer must provide a safe and healthful workplace. If you have concerns, you have the right to speak up about them without fear of retaliation.

Under section 11(c) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, a worker who refused to work would be protected from retaliation if:

- The worker believes that they faced death or serious injury (and the situation is so clearly hazardous that any reasonable person would believe the same thing);
- The worker tried, where possible, to get his or her employer to correct the condition, was unable to obtain a correction, and there is no other way to do the job safely; or
- The situation is so urgent that the worker does not have time to eliminate the hazard through regulatory channels, such as calling OSHA:

See 29 CFR 1977.12(b) for more information.

Employers and workers can visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's COVID-19 webpage and frequently asked questions to learn more about reasonable accommodations.

You have the right to file a complaint if you are required to work and believe you are being exposed to a serious health or safety hazard. If you have suffered retaliation because you voiced concerns about a health or safety hazard, you have the right to file a whistleblower protection complaint. No particular form is required, and complaints may be submitted in any language.

**16. When can employees who have had COVID-19, or who may have had COVID-19, return to the workplace?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides guidance about the discontinuation of home isolation for people with COVID-19. In settings covered by the Emergency Temporary Standard for Healthcare, employers should consult the standard for return-to-work requirements.