



# National Endowment for the Humanities

## COVID-19 Operational and Safety Plan

For Staff, Contractors, and Visitors



November 2021 Update

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## Overview

The overarching goal of NEH's COVID-19 Operational Plan is the health and safety of NEH's staff. To ensure the staff's health and safety as we plan for a gradual, modified return to the building, NEH will follow all CDC, OMB, and OPM guidance. During what we are calling the Interim Year of NEH's reopening, which will run from November 1, 2021 to October 31, 2022, we will allow for a partial, voluntary return to the building. NEH's offices will be reopened starting no earlier than May 1, 2022 on a limited basis for those who wish to return to in-person work. On a voluntary basis, and with the concurrence of their supervisors, staff may choose to work in the office no more than two days a week during this interim period. However, no more than 25 percent occupancy will be permitted at any given time, and maximum telework will remain an option for all staff during this period. Those who choose to work from the office will be required to practice social distancing and to wear approved masks. In addition, all non-essential travel will be suspended through April 30, 2022. The policies described in this document as well as the FAQs are subject to modification as pandemic conditions change.

## The NEH Interim Year

### Interim Year: November 1, 2021-October 31, 2022

- November 1, 2021                      Beginning of Interim Year
- November 30, 2021                  Share plan with staff
- February, 2022                        NEH assesses remote work arrangement
- June, 2022                              NEH assesses hybrid work arrangement
- September 1, 2022                  Release plan for post-interim year
- October 31, 2022                      End of interim year

### Interim Building Reopening

- January 3, 2022                      NEH provides update on reopening plan
- April 1, 2022                          Deadline for staff to share workplace preferences
- April 15, 2022                        Staff informed of in-building work schedules
- May 1, 2022                            NEH offices reopen (in reduced capacity)
- November 1, 2022                    NEH offices fully reopen, as appropriate

## Interim Year

During an interim year lasting from November 1, 2021, to October 31, 2022, NEH will have a flexible policy for remote, telework, and in-person operations.

During this time, employees who are currently remote or teleworking will be able to continue in their current work environment, if desired. Full-time, permanent staff who want to return to the office will be able to do so on a limited basis, in negotiation with their supervisors and in accordance with ASO's return to building policies, following the procedures outlined below.

During the interim period, NEH will assess the effectiveness of the current policies and evaluate ongoing changes in the pandemic. This assessment will be used to inform short and long-term updates to the teleworking policy.

At least 60 days before the conclusion of the interim period (September 1, 2022), employees will be alerted of new policies for telework, remote work, and in-person attendance.

## Interim Building Reopening

During the interim year, if safe, NEH will allow staff to return at up to 25% capacity at any one time, for up to two days per week, following the procedures outlined below. NEH may increase or decrease the capacity rate at any time given changes in the COVID-19 conditions in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. At the end of the interim year, the agency will reassess pandemic safety conditions and, if conditions permit, the building will fully reopen.

At least two months before the interim reopening, the agency will circulate an update to the Safe Federal Workplace Plan (below), which outlines safety policies at the Constitution Center and in the NEH offices.

At this point, if the CDC and local guidelines permit reopening, staff will be given at least two weeks' notice to complete an online form establishing their work preferences for the interim year. That form will ask staff to provide:

- 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 in the building, if applicable. Work schedules will need to be coordinated with OHR, ASO, and supervisors to ensure safety protocols are met.

### Staff Schedules Set

By April 15, 2022, two weeks in advance of the interim reopening date, the agency will provide staff with a plan for the reopening of the building, including:

- Informing each staff member of their in-building work schedule and location of their workspaces, as necessary to maintain capacity and social distancing. On rare occasions, staff may be temporarily relocated to unoccupied workstations.
- Restating policies for masking, social distancing, vaccination, and use of shared spaces for staff returning to the building.
- Stating policies for outside visitors.

### Interim Reopening Day

On the designated date, staff will be permitted to begin working in the building, following the established schedules and protocols outlined.

If staff find they do not feel safe returning to the building, they may revert to telework status, but must inform the agency of their plans.

## Updates to the Policy

### Maintaining communication

The Chief of Staff's weekly updates will keep staff abreast of agency return-to-work policy – either confirming the status quo or describing any changes to the building work policies.

When possible, any updates on return-to-building status will be given to staff at least one month in advance, in line with the schedule above.

### Requesting a change in status

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.

### COVID spread

If the CDC or DC city guidelines become more stringent, NEH staff will be alerted immediately. NEH has the right to move some or all staff back to remote work at any time, to reduce staff in-building time, or to increase safety regulations in order to remain compliant with safety policies.

In the case that the stated interim reopening date is unsafe, the NEH will continue monthly assessments following the schedule set out above. At the time when reopening is determined to be safe:

- Staff will be given at least two weeks to request a return to building.
- Staff will be provided with a return to building schedule at least two weeks before the building reopens.

## NEH's COVID-19 Safe Federal Workplace: Safety Principles

### Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide safety principles for staff, contractors, and visitors in the Constitution Center workspace. In his Executive Order, "[Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#)," dated January 20, 2021, President Biden established a "Safer Federal Workforce Task Force" to oversee the development and implementation of agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans across the Federal Government.

NEH's plan is primarily focused on applying the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to the federal workplace—specifically related to masking and physical distancing. NEH's plan is not meant to be comprehensive, and additional implementing guidance will follow as necessary.

This document establishes a minimum level for NEH's workplace safety standards associated with masking and physical distancing in our workspace. In developing our COVID-19 workplace safety plans, NEH did not deviate from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force core principles. NEH will continue to consult with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force to discuss special circumstances or higher-risk work environments.

This document has been updated to reflect changes in guidance through OMB Directive M 21-15, the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force, the CDC, OSHA and OPM as of October 2021.

### Overview of Model Principles

NEH is committed to addressing essential work requirements consistent with best public health practices.

The Biden Administration made a major commitment to ensure the health and safety of all federal employees, on-site contractors, and individuals interacting with the Federal workforce. As set forth in the January 20, 2021, Executive Order on "Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing," the policy of the Administration is "to halt the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by relying on the best available data and science-based public health measures," including taking a science-based and data-driven approach to safety in federal workplaces.

The principles presented then and today are aligned with the latest guidance from the CDC and established public health best practices, based on our evolving understanding of the pandemic. Principles will be updated as conditions warrant and are subject to change with little or no advanced notice.

As we consider our transition to a post-pandemic work environment, NEH will follow OPM's supplemental core principles, which have been developed through extensive stakeholder engagement and which are consistent with the guidance provided in Section IV(A) on Values-Informed Planning

- Promote a flexible and agile workforce: Provide supervisors and employees with the ability to leverage telework, remote work, and flexible work schedules to support mission delivery and work-life balance, balanced appropriately by the requirements of the position and the most effective work environments for delivery of the agency's and team's mission;



- Empower agency decision-making: While achieving appropriate consistency across agencies, promote agency discretion and flexibility in decision making, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work;
- Strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce: Expand the Federal Government's ability to recruit and retain the best and most diverse talent from all segments of the country by improving the equity and accessibility of opportunity and creating environments where all feel welcome and can contribute to the delivery of the agency's mission; and
- Consider our communities: Account for the impact on local communities and economies when making decisions about the nationwide Federal workforce.

## Current policies

### Face Masks and Shields

Staff, including National Council Members, have been issued embroidered face masks. Additional disposable face masks are available through Administrative Services. Face shields are also available upon request.

NEH is following CDC and local Washington DC guidelines in determining masking requirements in its offices.

Currently, federal employees, contractors, and visitors must wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth and is in accordance with any current CDC and OSHA guidance. CDC recommends the following: non-medical disposable masks, masks that fit properly (snugly around the nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face), masks made with breathable fabric (such as cotton), masks made with tightly woven fabric (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source), masks with two or three layers, and masks with inner filter pockets. Agencies should not allow novelty/non-protective masks, masks with ventilation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks.

Appropriate masks should be worn consistently in all common areas or shared workspaces (including open floorplan office space, cubicle embankments, and conference rooms). Masks should also be worn in outdoor shared spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. The NEH will provide exceptions such as when an employee is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door or for a limited time, when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Individuals may be asked to lower their masks briefly for identification purposes in compliance with safety and security requirements.

High levels of community transmission is a metric that will guide NEH policy. [COVID Data Tracker County View](#).

### Vaccines

All federal employees must be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021, except in limited circumstances, where an employee is legally entitled to an accommodation. Employees who are on maximum telework or working remotely are not excused from this requirement.

The federal government requires that individuals who start their government service after November 22, 2021, be fully vaccinated prior to their start date, except in limited circumstances where an accommodation is legally required. However, should the NEH have an urgent,

mission-critical hiring need to onboard new staff prior to those new staff becoming fully vaccinated, the agency head may delay the vaccination requirement—in the case of such limited delays, the NEH should require new hires to be fully vaccinated within 60 days of their start date and to follow safety protocols for not fully vaccinated individuals until they are fully vaccinated.

When an NEH employee is required to be vaccinated, the time the employee spends obtaining any COVID-19 vaccination dose (including travel time) is considered duty time; thus, there is no need for the employee to take administrative leave for such time during the employee's basic tour of duty.

Employees who fail to comply with the 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 removal.

The NEH may be required to provide an accommodation to employees who communicate to the agency that they are not vaccinated against COVID-19 because of a medical disability or because of a sincerely held religious belief, practice or observance.

For purposes of its safety protocols, NEH considers employees fully vaccinated for COVID-19, two weeks after they have received the requisite number of doses of a COVID-19 vaccine approved or authorized for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or that has been listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization. For Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or AstraZeneca/Oxford, that is two weeks after an employee who has received the second dose in a two-dose series. For Johnson and Johnson (J&J)/Janssen, that is two weeks after an employee has received a single dose.

Employees should obtain advance approval from their supervisor for COVID-19 vaccination purposes.

[Find a free COVID-19 vaccine near you.](#) You can also call 1-800-232-0233 or text your zip code to 438829.

[Frequently asked questions about the COVID-19 Vaccination.](#)

## Testing

### [COVID-19 Testing Overview](#)

Testing of NEH employees, on-site contractors, or visitors will be required if not fully vaccinated.

## Contact Tracing

NEH's COVID-19 Response Team will collaborate with and support the contact tracing programs of local health departments to help identify, track, and manage contacts of COVID-19 cases. The Administrative Service Office will coordinate infection control and workplace safety efforts once informed of a case of COVID-19 (either due to specific symptoms or positive test or report from the Facilities Security Committee).

NEH's OHR team, has the responsibility to make disclosures to local public health officials as required or necessary to provide for the public health and safety of federal employees and contractors, in accordance with local public health mandates.



NEH leadership will be transparent in communicating relevant information to the workforce consistent with local and Federal privacy and confidentiality regulations and laws.

## Travel

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.

## CDC and OMB Guidance on Travel

NEH staff, contractors, and visitors should adhere strictly to CDC guidelines before, during, and after travel, regardless of whether the travel is personal or for official business. At this time, these include the following precautions: carefully assessing travel risk prior to travel, wearing a mask during all portions of a trip, maintaining physical distance from non-household members, maintaining good hand hygiene by regularly washing hands with soap and water, or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, and getting tested and staying home after higher-risk travel before returning to the workplace. The CDC has extensive guidelines for both domestic and international travel, and NEH personnel should consult these resources carefully before deciding to travel. Additional resources for official travel can be found on the GSA COVID-19 Information Site.

In accordance with CDC regulations, staff who return from official or personal travel should self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms, isolate and get tested if symptoms occur. There is no need to get tested or self-quarantine if staff is fully vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 in the past three months.

## Symptom Monitoring

If NEH employees, on-site contractors, or visitors are not feeling well, they should not enter the Constitution Center.

A symptom list requiring immediate medical attention can be accessed on the CDC website.

Any individual who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the workday must immediately isolate, notify their supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace.

## Quarantine and Isolation

Any individual with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 will be advised to isolate, pursuant to CDC guidelines, and in compliance with local and state regulations. Personnel who have had a close contact in the past seven days with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should follow CDC and local guidance for quarantine requirements.

The Resting and Privacy Rooms will serve as in-house isolation areas. The service elevators will be used to transport individuals to the nearest exit point.

## Confidentiality

All medical information collected from personnel, including test results and any other information obtained as a result of testing and symptom monitoring, will be treated confidentially in accordance with applicable law, and accessible only by those with a need to know in order to protect the health, safety and privacy of personnel. NEH staff should contact the Office of Human Resources for all questions relating to personal medical data.

## Workplace Operations

### Occupancy and Parking

Currently, staff must be approved by Anthony Mitchell or Robert Straughter before gaining admittance to NEH office space. Approved staff will be granted access to the Constitution Center parking garage to minimize use of public transportation. This policy is subject to change. All staff must wear a mask and have an agency issued ID card to gain access at garage booths and main entrances.

### Social and Physical Distancing

To the extent practicable, individuals may be asked to maintain distance of at least six feet from others at times, consistent with CDC guidelines, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal workspaces.

Social distancing and testing do not substitute for wearing masks when required. Individuals should maintain distance AND properly wear masks, regardless of vaccination status. Sneeze guards, face masks, and face shields are available thru ASO to minimize risk.

### Environmental Cleaning

Enhanced cleaning in common use/high touch/high density spaces, such as lobbies, restrooms, and elevators are in place. Office space that is routinely occupied will be cleaned regularly, and in accordance with CDC guidelines. Wipes, gloves, and other EPA-approved disinfectants are available for individuals to wipe down their workstation and related personal property. Physical barriers such as plexiglass shields have been installed where appropriate.

In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace (if the individual had been in the building up to seven days prior), enhanced environmental cleaning will be performed in accordance with CDC and GSA guidance.

If such enhanced cleaning is required, NEH will wait 24 hours before cleaning or disinfecting. If 24 hours is not feasible, NEH will wait as long as possible. Personnel and visitors may be asked to vacate the affected space until cleaning or disinfection is completed.

The NEH COVID-19 Response Team will determine the appropriate scope of workplace closures—in some cases, it may be a suite or offices or part of a floor; in other cases, it may include the entire building.

NEH will periodically perform a ‘deep cleaning’ procedure based on our space occupancy.

### Hygiene

Hand sanitizer stations are strategically placed throughout our workspaces, and contain FDA-approved hand sanitizer, with at least 60% ethanol. Personnel will be encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer or alcohol-based hand rubs frequently.

## Ventilation and Air Filtration

GSA has notified lessors for all active GSA leases that they are expected, as the landlord, to follow current industry practices by considering the application of the latest CDC guidance concerning building ventilation and water systems.

As it relates to the ventilation system: Constitution Center has supply air handling units on the roof that are equipped with two layers of filtration; the first layer of filters consists of MERV 8 and the second layer MERV-14. The HVAC in the floors consist of a chilled beam system divided in interior and exterior zones. The interior chilled beams serve only interior spaces and are fed from air handling units that use 100% outside air constantly. The exterior chilled beams serve only exterior offices, offices with windows, and they are fed from different air handling units that use a minimum of 40% outside air. This means that sometimes the exterior units can get more than 40% outside air depending on the weather. As one measure to address COVID-19 transmission concerns, HINES is ventilating the floors space in the building 1.5 hours early and 1.5 hours later each business day.

## Visitors

At this time, NEH visitors to the Constitution Center are prohibited. Primarily only support contractors have access to the building. Staff is encouraged to conduct visits virtually where possible. Visitors must comply with the FSC's approved building entry process.

## Staggered Work Times and Cohort-Based Scheduling

Staff will be able to work in the office in a limited capacity according to the schedule described in the Operational Plan. Staff schedules may be staggered to reduce density, minimize traffic volume in elevators, and avoid crowds during commuting. OHR will work with OPM to understand the pay and leave implications surrounding staggered work schedules and other flexibilities.

## Elevators

Currently, individuals must wear masks in elevators and in elevator lobbies.

The use of stairs by those who are physically able is strongly encouraged. Hand sanitizing equipment has been placed in elevator lobbies and adjacent to stairwells.

## Shared Spaces

Shared tools and equipment must be disinfected by users anytime the equipment is used by or transferred to a new person, and disinfectant sprays and wipes are placed throughout agency space. This includes phones, computers and other communication devices, kitchen implements, and other office equipment. Refrigerators, water coolers, and coffee makers with disposable cups (or a personal re-usable cup/container) and single serve condiments and creamers may be used with proper hand hygiene. Steps will be taken to limit the number of people who can use common spaces at any one time, and signage outlining these limits will be prominently displayed.

## Health Unit

The NEH shares a Health Unit with the Federal Trade Commission. The Unit is open Monday thru Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Please feel free to visit them by signing out an access badge from the Office of Human Resources.

## Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The EAP provided by HHS/Federal Occupational Health is a comprehensive program that helps employees and their family resolve personal problems 24 hours a day/7 day a week that may adversely impact their work performance, conduct, health, and overall well-being. FOH's EAP addresses problems in the quickest, least restrictive, and most convenient manner possible while protecting client confidentiality.

EAP Counselors may be reached at (800)222-0364, TTY (888)262-7848.

## Various COVID-related teams

### Health and Safety COVID-19 Response Team

Kelsey Coates, Shelby Lopez, Michael McDonald, Tony Mitchell, and Robert Straughter

This group meets to review guidance from the CDC, OMB, and OPM.

NEH's COVID-19 Response Team ([crt@neh.gov](mailto:crt@neh.gov)) will research and answer specific questions related to the agency's current operating status. Answers are given based on the best available information at the time.

### Re-opening Task Force

Derika Ferdinand Walker, Tony Mitchell, Robert Straughter, and Kiara Whitaker

This group meets regularly to review relevant guidance and data.

### Return to Building Working Group

Hannah Alpert-Abrams, Gina Bono, John Cox, Derika Ferdinand Walker, Charles Hester, Tony Mitchell, Marc Ruppel, Margaret Scrymser, Robert Straughter, and Kiara Whitaker (Intern Michelle Chandler)

This group met weekly to review this plan. It will meet regularly to review relevant guidance and data.