Supporting foundation staff resilience and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic

Foundations will in the main fulfil their charitable mission by working with others outside their organisation. But the wellbeing of their own staff matters - not just for their responsibilities as a good employer but also to achieving their mission, living out their values, and supporting applicants and grantees.

Social isolation, grief, erosion of physical and psychological safety, changes to ways of working, uncertainty, caregiving responsibilities and financial strain, exacerbated and amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic, are likely to negatively impact staff resilience and wellbeing for many employees, whatever sector they work in.

But while few foundation staff are operating professionally at the front line of the crisis, there are some impacts on foundation staff specifically that foundations should take into account. These include the surging demand from applicants seeking emergency funding, increasing frequency of rejecting applications, and interacting with grant-seekers who are under immense strain due to the pandemic and may be desperate for financial support. Foundations are rarely set up to respond to emergencies, yet most have operated on this basis in recent months.

This document brings together a list of resources and information to help foundations think about how best to support their staff, and what questions they should consider in addressing staff resilience and wellbeing. In putting together this resource, it is important for us to hear from foundation staff about what issues or concerns are impacting their resilience and wellbeing, and how they could best be supported through this. We would also welcome examples of how your foundation is supporting staff through the pandemic.

This is a living document which we will continue to add to. If you would like to contribute any wellbeing resources, experiences or issues of concern to this document, please fill out this form or email joanna@acf.org.uk

The document is organised by issues of concern, though many of these will overlap and build on one another:

1. New ways of working
2. Mental health challenges
3. Burnout

New ways of working

Working virtually has tested foundation staff digital skills, and for those who are used to a certain way of working it may result in frustration and a longer period of adapting.

- ❏ *Tip:* Make sure staff are supported in this iterative process and be flexible with those who take longer to adapt.
- ❏ *Tip:* Take time to ensure all staff are comfortable using new digital tools, staying mindful and inclusive of different accessibility needs.

Remote working: Aside from the technical difficulties that arise in adapting to the home office, foundation staff will also be adapting to being at home constantly. Workplace wellbeing challenges can easily arise when there is no clear separation between work and home, and when staff feel isolated. Remote work means no more opportunities for casual interactions that foster connections between staff.

- ❏ *Tip*: Create social activities that help overcome isolation. Examples:
  - ➔ Cross-team wellbeing groups arranging online social activities (e.g. quizzes, art sessions, film clubs, book clubs, yoga)
  - ➔ Twice a week 30 min 'hangouts' to chat as a team and not discuss anything work related.
  - ➔ Create a peer support network by setting up a mentoring scheme and encouraging employees to sign up as mentors/mentees

Further reading
- ★ National Cyber Security Centre: [Home working: preparing your organisation and staff](#)
- ★ Civil Society: [How to build back an inclusive charity workspace post lockdown](#)
- ★ Small Charities Coalition: [Guide to Better Mental Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19](#)
- ★ Mental Health at Work: [Supporting your mental health while working from home](#)
- ★ Mind: [Working From Home Wellness Action Plan](#)
- ★ Mind: [Coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)
- ★ JustGiving: [10 Tips for Working from Home](#)
- ★ Charity Comms: [How do you maintain a sense of team remotely?](#)
- ★ British Red Cross: [Top tips for supporting your team's mental health while working from home](#)

Mental health challenges

Some employees might already struggle with pre-existing trauma, anxiety or depression, while others will feel the psychological burden of grief, trauma and general anxiety brought on by the pandemic. The charity Mind found that nearly two-thirds (60%) of people across England reported that their mental health had got worse during the pandemic.

Leadership has an important role in being honest about their own experiences and responding to concerns - especially line managers who will often be the first point of contact to offer additional support. Management therefore needs to receive enough support to effectively support their staff, as well as coping with their own personal challenges. Increasing conversation around and awareness of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is crucial in tackling stigma and building trust.

- ❏ *Tip:* Share, signpost to, and make use of existing resources, such as:
  - ➔ Tools to help staff articulate how they are coping to line managers and reduce stigma: click here to view an example
  - ➔ Training sessions for employers delivered by Mind, with focus in equipping management to support staff

- ❏ *Tip:* Organise regular meetings between staff to check in and talk. Examples:
  - ➔ 121s for all staff fortnightly to check in and ask about wellbeing, workload levels, impact of Covid ways of working - these don't need to be by video and phone calls can be preferable
  - ➔ Encourage staff and their managers to re-look at goals and objectives and adjust them if they are no longer realistic and achievable in current circumstances
  - ➔ Increased frequency of grants team meetings and management team meetings, getting a better sense of workload pressures within the team and ways of supporting (see also section on burnout below)
  - ➔ Social drop ins (informal opportunities for employees to come together and share/talk)
  - ➔ Internal support network among leaders/managers to help maintain morale

Mental health experiences will differ and be significantly shaped by race, gender, finances, job type, disability, caregiving responsibilities, immigration status, and other factors specific to each person. Approaches to wellbeing will need to be tailored to the individual's own context and needs.

Extra care will be necessary for staff who may need bereavement support. Some may also feel grief on behalf of communities with which they most closely associate or are part of,

even if they themselves have not directly suffered a bereavement of someone close to them. This may be especially black staff or staff from ethnic minority communities who have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

- ❏ *Tip:* Learning sessions are a good way to educate staff around anxiety, grief, and other obstacles to resilience and wellbeing, making it easier for staff to communicate their own mental health challenges.
- ❏ *Tip:* Gather wellbeing feedback to monitor how staff are doing. This could be:
  - ➔ Live data from speaking with staff
  - ➔ In-house surveys checking in on how staff are finding work, what support is needed

Further reading
- ★ ACEVO and Mental Health First Aid England: Workforce Wellbeing in Charities
- ★ City Mental Health Alliance: Mental Health and Race Toolkit
- ★ Mind: Wellness Action Plans (for line managers as well as employees, to help structure conversations around mental health experiences and needs)
- ★ Mind: Coronavirus and work
- ★ Mind: Training and elearning
- ★ Mind: How to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem
- ★ Mind: Other resources
- ★ McKinsey: Covid-19 and the employee experience
- ★ Bupa: Talking about mental health problems and dealing with disclosure
- ★ GQ: How to look after black employees' grief in the workplace
- ★ Harvard Business Review: 8 Ways Managers Can Support Employees' Mental Health
- ★ Mental Health at Work: Resources
- ★ Mental Health at Work: Being anti-racist in the workplace
- ★ Mental Health at Work: Starting the Conversation (can be adapted to online)
- ★ Mental Health Foundation: How to look after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak
- ★ Mental Health Foundation: Supporting the wellbeing and mental health of People of Colour and Black people in the workplace
- ★ Mind Share Partners: Supporting Employee Mental Health During The Coronavirus Epidemic - Toolkit
- ★ Mates in Mind: Managing Mental Health and Covid-19
- ★ United for Global Mental Health: Webinar Series
- ★ Creating work climates that facilitate and maximise the benefits of disclosing mental health problems in the workplace
- ★ Red Cross: Virtual mental health training courses for your workplace

Burnout

The pandemic is a hugely difficult time for the voluntary sector, and foundations have seen increased demand for funding and support. Those making grants will inevitably have to make really difficult decisions and say no to many organisations who are struggling or even on the brink of collapse. This can lead to worries that staff are not doing enough to support the sector during the crisis. But the wellbeing of foundation staff is crucial if they are to be effective in meeting the needs of grantees.

❏ *Tip*: Encourage staff to take annual leave and spend time on themselves, away from work, to recharge and refresh. Example:
  ➔ Many organisations have offered staff a 'wellness' day to recognise their hard work and give space for rest and recharge
  ➔ Encourage staff to use daylight hours to go outside and take longer lunch breaks, "time out to get out"
  ➔ Wellbeing time allocated in the calendar to give a break from meetings and switch off
❏ Tip: Gestures that recognise the challenging time staff are going through and show appreciation for their work. Examples:
  ➔ An annual wellbeing allowance of claimable expenses against activities or items helping staff wellbeing
  ➔ A care packages sent to staff

Further reading
  ★ Lloyds Bank Foundation: [How to prevent burnout: 11 simple ways to make self care a priority](#)
  ★ Move to End Violence: [21 Day Self Care Challenge](#)