



The union for financial professionals.  
Le syndicat des professionnels de la finance.

## ACFO-ACAF Position: Returning to the office

### Context

In March 2020, in response to the fast-moving COVID-19 pandemic, the federal public service pivoted, in a matter of days, to a primarily virtual operation in order to limit the mobility of hundreds of thousands of workers and help flatten the curve. While this was a fundamental shift by the largest employer in the country, the transition was a success, with an analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives showing the public service maintained 95% productivity despite the monumental disruption.

Not only did the public service keep running largely uninterrupted, public servants also took on the task of designing, developing and deploying some of the largest social programs in the country's history, spinning up the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and making wholesale changes to the Employment Insurance program. These efforts were praised by the Auditor General, who noted that "the public service focused on the desired outcome: helping Canadians fast."

With vaccine coverage growing every day and case counts declining across the country, attention has now shifted to the eventual return to the workplace and adaptation to the new realities of work in Canada.

### ACFO-ACAF's Recommendations

It is clear that while some workers are keen to return to the workplace, at least part-time, the pandemic has shown that the public service can function without 100% of employees in the office 100% of the time. To that end, ACFO-ACAF believes all members should be given the option of:

- Remote work 100% of the time;
- working from the office 100% of the time; or
- a hybrid model, with some work done in the office and some done remotely.

Furthermore, it is our position that if a request for telework is denied, a written explanation should be provided outlining the reasons that work cannot be done remotely.

Lastly, it is ACFO-ACAF's position that hiring managers should be encouraged to remove area of selection limitations when possible, in accordance with [the recommendation published by the Office of the Comptroller General in Spring 2021](#).

## **Rationale**

The pandemic has shown that the public service can not only survive but thrive with large numbers of public service workers teleworking. The pandemic forced a change in mindset of managers and the rapid improvement of IT infrastructure that was long overdue. Attempting to claw back those changes now would not only hamper morale but could make it challenging for the government to recruit and retain talent in the post-COVID world.

Workers have shown they can be trusted to do their jobs no matter where their computer sits and while surveys have shown that some are keen to return to their own workplaces, provided that appropriate health and safety measures are in place, many more want the flexibility to continue to work remotely, at least part time. That desire is not necessarily new, but the pandemic has shown that old arguments against flexible work no longer hold water.

If the Government of Canada wants to benefit from the best and brightest minds, it should adapt to the changing expectations of workers and allow for flexibility in work location.

If your work arrangement request is denied, please reach out to [labourrelations@acfo-acaf.com](mailto:labourrelations@acfo-acaf.com).