

Keeping Office Culture Alive

Organizations around the globe are facing the challenge of maintaining a strong culture while physical offices are closed for the foreseeable future. As a global consulting firm with nine offices around the world, Global Prairie has been cultivating our culture both in person and virtually since we first opened our doors in 2008. In this primer on **Keeping Office Culture Alive**, we've gathered best practices from our own experience as well as insights from experts on how to ensure employees feel connected and engaged with your unique culture, even when working remotely. For more help ensuring your team has the information and resources to adjust to remote work, contact us at info@globalprairie.com.

Identifying Your Cultural Pillars

→ **Understand what truly defines your culture.**

For most organizations, office culture is primarily reinforced through in-person interactions, events and activities. But there's so much more than physical proximity that influences what it feels like for employees to work for a particular company. So, while leaders consider how to maintain virtual team engagement, now is the time to reflect upon the pillars that shape the intangible ethos and pulse of your organization. What is your organization's purpose, and how are your values lived and expressed day in and day out by employees? How did these values guide the culture-building activities you chose to invest in prior to this crisis? By articulating the pillars that shape your unique culture, you can identify exactly what needs to be translated into the new virtual expression of that culture.

→ **Ensure team members know that culture remains a priority.**

After evaluating the core pillars of your culture, we recommend leaders take time to proactively, and regularly, engage with teams on the topic. Especially while projects, processes and priorities may be in flux, it can be reassuring for teams to hear that their organization's values and culture remain unchanged. By communicating the importance of keeping culture alive, leaders can signal to their employees their continued investment in team morale and their faith in the long-term sustainability of the organization.



→ **Empower all employees to contribute to culture building.**

Culture is built and bolstered by every member of the team. So, while organizations are exploring ways to ensure their culture remains strong during this time, we recommend harnessing the creativity and ingenuity of the collective. By empowering employees to help steward company culture now, organizations can foster a sense of co-ownership in the long run. We suggest creating a clear process for employees across the company to submit ideas for fostering a thriving remote culture, and vocal celebration of those who are positively contributing to keep the culture alive.

Activating a Remote Culture

→ **Create communication channels devoted to your cultural values.**

Work chat platforms like Microsoft Teams, Slack, and Yammer can be valuable tools for reinforcing company culture. We suggest creating virtual spaces, or topic-specific “channels”, that are devoted to your cultural pillars. For example, if gratitude is an important part of your culture, consider creating a Give Thanks channel where colleagues can express appreciation and give recognition to their teammates. If philanthropy or social impact is core to your organization, create a channel where teams can share information and ideas for supporting crisis response efforts. And of course, these culture channels can be lighthearted as well, like a WFH storytelling channel that provides a space for teams to unwind over silly anecdotes about partners, children, and pets.

→ **Schedule activities that reinforce your unique culture.**

With in-person team bonding activities off the table, organizations are now grappling with how to translate these events to the virtual realm. As a start, we recommend ensuring that regular team outings, such as lunches or happy hours, are kept on the calendar using video platforms. We also suggest making time for additional engagement to fill the social void that remote workers are facing. Fortunately, digital platforms can facilitate scores of group activities, from online workouts to virtual games. As organizations consider their options, it’s important to select activities that will feel authentic and aligned with your unique culture. For more cerebral or formal teams, a group discussion focused on a book or article may fit the bill. If health and wellness is a cultural pillar, consider an online yoga or meditation class.

→ **Prioritize relationships.**

While group activities play an important role in keeping culture alive, it’s equally important to ensure individual relationships remain strong across teams. We recommend managers and mentors increase the frequency of one-on-ones with direct reports and mentees during this time, making sure to address any new concerns related to the current crisis, while also talking about long-term goals. We also suggest teams encourage “virtual coffees” between colleagues to provide time for informal conversation and catch-ups that would otherwise be had over the water cooler.

→ **Embrace the opportunity to get to know each other better.**

With dogs barking and children tugging on sleeves in virtual meetings, the boundaries between the personal and the professional have temporarily eroded. And while this new arrangement brings challenges aplenty, teams can choose to embrace these intrusions as opportunities to learn more about one another and strengthen connection between colleagues. We recommend organizations make dedicated time for employees to introduce their new “officemates” — whether they’re children, parents, or pets — to their teams, and to consider including them in virtual team engagement activities. The potential for greater intimacy represents a silver lining to the difficult circumstances we find ourselves in that will ultimately strengthen team culture in the long run.