

WHITE PAPER

*The Center for  
Organizational  
Excellence, Inc.*

*CohnReznick LLP*

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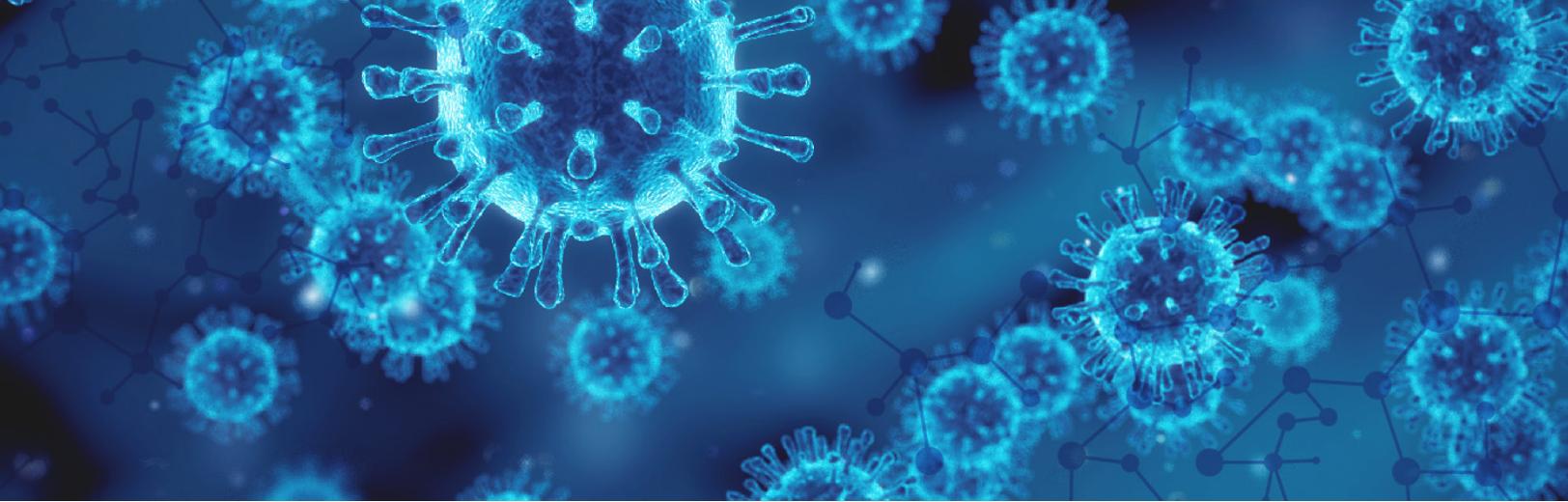
# FUNCTIONING EFFECTIVELY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

A comprehensive approach to maintaining and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic and future natural disasters



**“ We are witnessing what will surely be remembered as a historic deployment of remote work and digital access to services across every domain, including medicine, education, government, entertainment, and more. ”**

**—Bob Swan**  
*American Business Executive*



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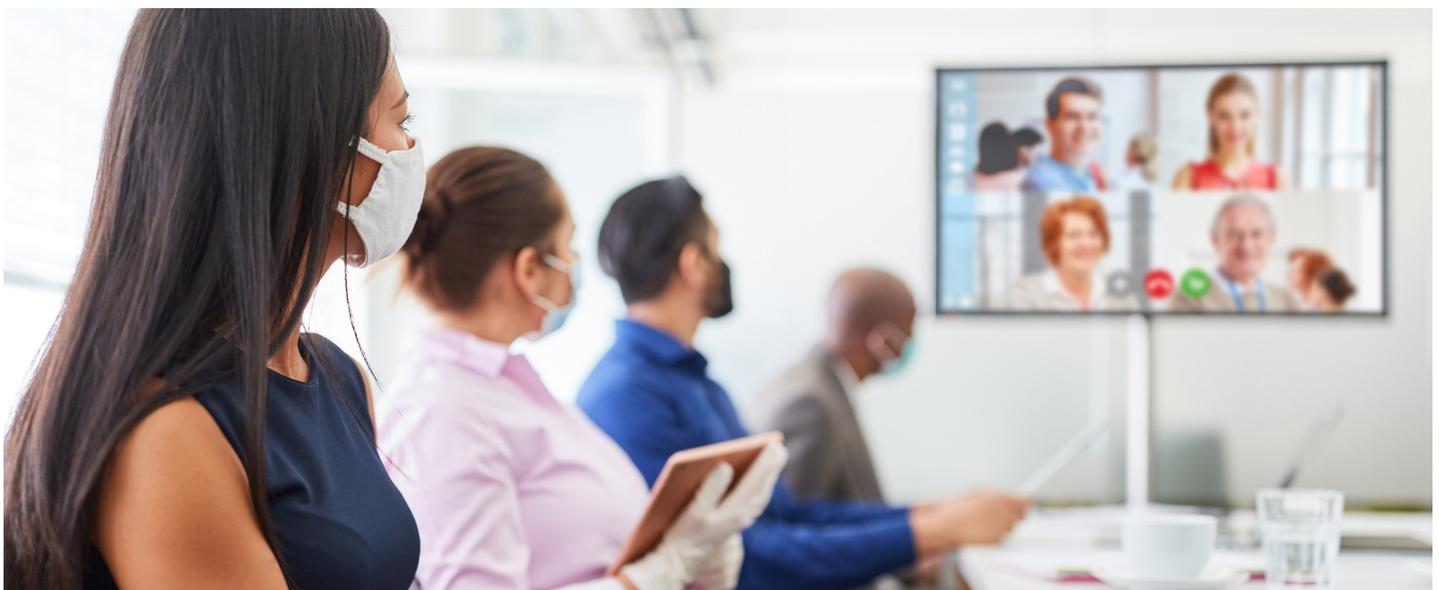
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## COVID-19: AN ERA OF THE EVOLVING “NORMAL”

2020 is a year we won't soon forget. In just a few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected millions of people and organizations around the world. Here at home, hundreds of thousands of Americans have died;\* millions of U.S. workers have lost their jobs;\*\* tens of thousands of businesses have been financially disrupted or have gone bankrupt;\*\* and federal, state, and local governments have been forced to spend billions of dollars they simply don't have to maintain a reduced level of service to their constituents. Dual health and economic crises emerged overnight and continue almost unchecked to this day.



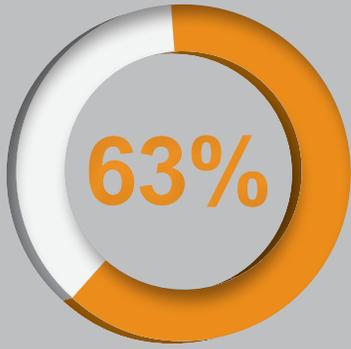
The temporary disruption at the onset of the pandemic has become the new normal, yet the systems that keep employees engaged and agencies effective have not been adjusted to keep pace. We've learned to adjust to wearing masks, being socially distanced, working from home, and losing the support of social constructs like schools, gyms, and nights out with friends. These changes have unacknowledged repercussions in the federal landscape. Dramatic changes in telework have changed the employment contract, but impacts to performance and productivity have not been assessed, nor have new oversight models been created. Supply chains and procurement actions have kept pace somewhat, but largely in terms of meeting surge requirements driven by COVID-19 imperatives, not to keep agency mission requirements functioning effectively. In addition, as with any disaster response, performance and financial audits need to be conducted and mission programs reassessed and adapted.



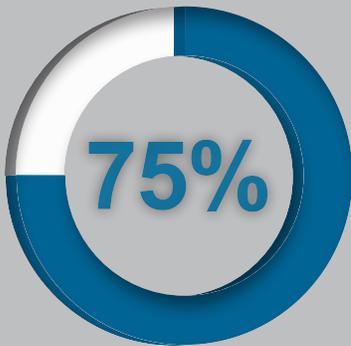
\*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dec. 2020

\*\*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sept. 2020

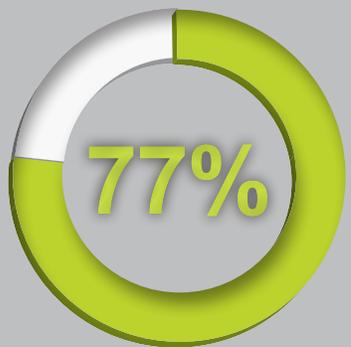
# IMPACT ON FEDERAL EMPLOYEES



of federal employees are teleworking\*



feel fraud, waste, and abuse has become a larger problem\*



of teleworkers feel it is a challenge managing IT networks\*

\*As reported by Nextgov Sept.-Oct. 2020

Governments focused their efforts on returning to normal as quickly as possible, as the pandemic was anticipated to subside during the summer months just as the flu season does. Unfortunately, the pandemic did not subside. Instead, it ebbed in the Northeast but then moved to our southern states and western regions of the country, and then to the Midwest. Rather than returning to normal, the new normal subsequently became the “**newest normal**” as the virus spread, and we learned more about it and how to treat it. The recent, aggressive increase in virus cases and deaths demands that we accept a new operating normal. This is not a temporary disruption. We are never getting back to the old normal. For the federal government, accepting a new operating normal means assessing the efficacy of old performance and accountability systems, adapting how agencies engage with employees and measure productivity, and examining accepted truisms about mission delivery requirements.

The Center for Organizational Excellence (COE) and CohnReznick have joined forces to offer federal, state, and local government agencies a broad range of solutions designed to address disruptions to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. In this paper, we will explore the unique disruptions caused by COVID-19 and introduce our approach for assessing, identifying, and mitigating them.

## NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

COVID-19 has disrupted the effective operation of federal, state, and local government agencies in several key ways. These disruptions have resulted in degradation of common services provided to constituents and stakeholders.

- 1 Reduced staffing, office closures, suspension of in-person meetings, and use of new service-at-a-distance strategies
- 2 Employees forced to work from home and significantly increased use of telework
- 3 Reduced effectiveness of business processes that were not designed for execution in distributed workforce operations
- 4 Failure of supporting technologies and infrastructure due to limited network bandwidth, lack of infrastructure for all employees working from home
- 5 Increased cybersecurity risks
- 6 Lack of uniformity in data collection, and data set utilization and management
- 7 The need to increase and allocate financial resources

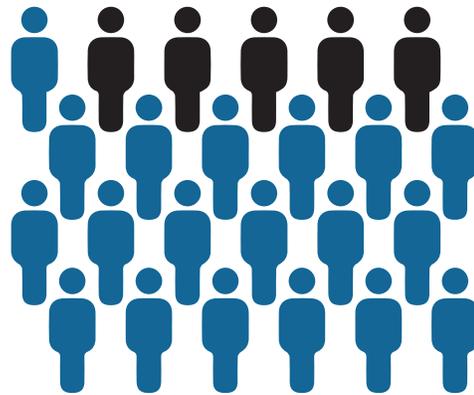
## Blueprint for operational effectiveness

Organizations had to quickly become comfortable with virtual software, figure out a new cadence for work, adjust performance productivity, and figure out how to have meetings and conversations, access data, address national security and facility requirements, deal with personnel issues, and much more. Funding of COVID-19 programs, while addressed by Congress, also requires that staff be reassigned away from other mission-critical work. Financial and program audits still have to be done during and post-COVID. Organizations are still wrestling with these and many other issues.

As we settle into the new normal, most organizations will permanently adopt some level of remote work. Doing so will require leaders to design and implement effective workforce enablement programs that align with their mission, strategy, technology platforms, and people.

In this document we introduce an approach for dealing with the impacts and challenges of COVID-19 on federal, state, and local governments. Our comprehensive methodology is designed to help your agency identify and assess those impacts and challenges along multiple organizational dimensions, develop strategies to mitigate and recover from them, evaluate the effectiveness and return on investment of recommendation implementation, and conduct re-assessment activities as required. Effective implementation of this methodology can help:

- ✓ Improve employee and organizational performance during and after the COVID-19 pandemic
- ✓ Improve employee quality of work life and job satisfaction, and reduce turnover
- ✓ Reinvent and improve leadership and management practices
- ✓ Improve the effectiveness of existing and re-engineered business processes
- ✓ Optimize and re-engineer technology infrastructures
- ✓ Improve the organization's physical security and cybersecurity
- ✓ Enhance the use and management of business data
- ✓ Improve the use and re-allocation of existing and future funding resources
- ✓ Ensure the effective use of funding and other resources to meet COVID-19 and other mission-critical requirements
- ✓ Realign mission-centric and mission-support programs for new organizational realities
- ✓ Audit to link spending to results



# 80%

of federal employees expect that telework will become the norm in the future.\*

*\*As reported by Nextgov, Oct. 2020*

# SUMMARY OF IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE WORKPLACE AND MISSION EXECUTION



## DISRUPTIONS to...

**Individual employees.** In addition to employees or family members getting sick, employees have experienced difficulty in adapting to teleworking, a sense of isolation, a lack of face-to-face interaction, the need to home-school children in addition to doing their jobs, etc. All of this has resulted in physical and emotional stress and fatigue and reduction in performance and productivity, the need to acquire new or additional job skills, the need to adapt to a potential 24/7 work day, and reduced communication with managers and co-workers, as well as program restructuring and effective use of taxpayer funds.

**The workforce.** COVID-19 has stressed pre-pandemic workforce designs and structures and has degraded workforce performance, collaboration, and the normal cadence of culture and how things get done. Existing team structures have become outmoded, team communication has been disrupted, and required team skills, now often lacking, need to be acquired. Hiring and onboarding employees, and welcoming them into the team culture, must be done remotely.

**Business processes.** Business processes designed for pre-pandemic use have often become less effective in the age of COVID-19 as communication and work performance are now being accomplished at a distance. Required steps have changed, data needs have evolved, face-to-face hand-offs have been replaced with electronic ones, timeframes for execution have shortened, and stakeholders have expanded or changed.

**Established physical facilities.** With many government employees working from home, most government facilities are partially or largely empty. That will change over time, but when most facilities re-open, they will do so at partial capacity, and there will be a widespread reluctance to use public transportation until most of the population has been vaccinated. Employees will be required to work six or more feet apart, and cubicles and shared workspaces such as conference rooms or copier spaces will have restricted access and occupancy limits. Physical barriers will be required in many areas, and cafeterias or coffee stations may be closed altogether. Hallways may need to have directional rules or restrictions. Rules on who gets a space, and when, will have to be re-thought. Existing rules will be inadequate.

**Required technology.** Existing technology infrastructures are already being overwhelmed due to increased telework demands. Virtual private networks are simply not scalable. Working and communicating at a distance have stressed network bandwidth, and required more employees to have at-home offices equipped with telework technologies. Existing collaboration tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams have not always been consistently adopted or utilized, and security is an issue. Contactless entry points are lacking and will be needed, and existing technologies such as security cameras will have to be re-purposed to help enforce space and facility quotas and limits.

**Cybersecurity & privacy.** Most cybersecurity challenges are emerging around the increased use of telework. Many networks and applications are less secure than they need to be, and this limits the type and amount of work that can be accomplished. The same is true for some types of cloud applications and translations. The increased emphasis on distributed workforces and working, communicating, and learning at a distance is causing government planners and managers to re-think their approach to cybersecurity in the age of COVID-19.



**Data access and management.** Governments were just starting to formalize and standardize the manner in which they capture, manage, and utilize business and operational data. Chief Data Officers (CDOs) were standardizing their job duties and responsibilities and becoming important members of government executive teams. COVID-19 has placed increased importance on the effective use of the right data by the right people in the right timeframes and has highlighted a need for data-driven decisions, work/program restructuring, and effective use of taxpayer funds.

**Budget planning and financial management.** COVID-19 has disrupted government agency financial planning and budget management. The increased need for distributed workforces, telework, new technologies and applications, and more effective internal and external communication has created a need to increase and redistribute budget funding in real time. Costs planned for a year ago are now being superseded by unanticipated financial requirements emerging almost weekly. Existing rules for re-programming funds to meet these needs are proving inadequate and too slow to implement.

## THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

The COVID-19 pandemic has permanently changed how we work in America. In the past, changes to how we work were largely driven by advances to computer technology, new insights from social science, or policy changes driven by politics. Today these changes are being driven by a life-threatening virus. Some will moderate or go away as the pandemic is brought under control. However, many of them are here to stay and will continue to evolve and influence the way we work. Key examples include:

- ✓ Employee hiring, onboarding, and credentialing will become more virtual. Managers may not meet new employees in person for several months or longer.
- ✓ The 9-5 workday, five-day work week, and common core hours are often being replaced with a fragmented workday that accommodates family responsibilities, four-day work weeks overall, and 24/7 core hours. Government employees who need to home-school or just care for children during the common workday are now turning to working evenings or overnight hours when possible to do their jobs.
- ✓ According to Nextgov, a recent survey found that 80% of government employees feel that widespread telework will continue well into the future, and 82% feel they will be working from home at least three days out of a four-day work week (*Nextgov, Oct. 2020*).
- ✓ Managing IT systems in the age of COVID-19 will require significant re-invention from the stop-gap solutions in place today. Companies should consider zero trust architectures, secure virtual access, and cloud native software-as-a-service solutions, among others, in order to maintain bandwidth and security going forward.
- ✓ For those who choose or are required to work in government facilities, there will most likely be staggered work times, more shared workspaces, more physical barriers, fewer in-person meetings, medical and mental health screenings, required personal protection equipment, and relaxed dress codes.
- ✓ There will likely be a reduction in air travel for business well into the future.
- ✓ eLearning or distance education may become much more widely used and adjusted to become more instructionally effective and user-friendly.
- ✓ More employees may become temporary or part-time, and many may take on side or part-time jobs because they can or need to in order to make their finances work.



**“ Often when you think you’re at the end of something, you’re at the beginning of something else. ”**

**—Fred Rogers**

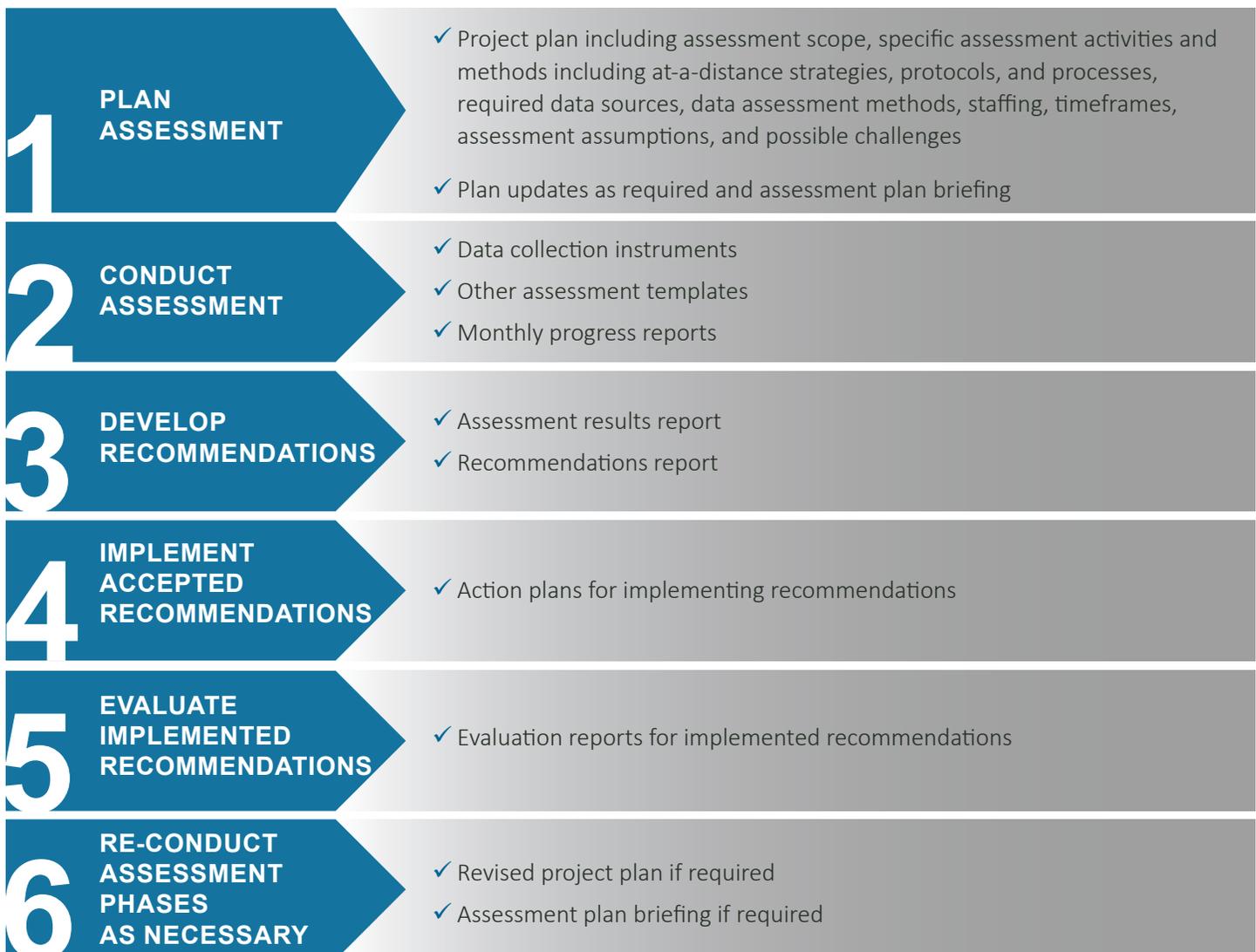
*Producer, American Television Host of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood”*

## OUR DIAGNOSTIC AND MITIGATION METHODOLOGY

Our comprehensive methodology is specifically designed to address the needs of agencies along organizational dimensions key to the accomplishment of critical missions and overall client success. Key methodology attributes include:

- ✓ A focus on the eight areas of disruption identified on pages 5-6,
- ✓ An emphasis on determining gaps between current versus evolving/desired organizational states,
- ✓ A design that is customizable to meet specific client needs and available resources in a timely fashion, which is agile in the sense that changes or revisions to the methodology can be made in real time,
- ✓ An assessment that can be conducted at a distance,
- ✓ The identification of actionable recommendations that can be incorporated into, and are compatible with, existing strategic and tactical plans, and
- ✓ An approach that is cost-effective and considered best value.

### Action steps in our assessment and mitigation methodology



## WHY WORK WITH COE AND COHNREZNICK?

The Center for Organizational Excellence (COE) and CohnReznick have joined forces to offer government agencies a broad range of effective and timely solutions designed to assess, identify, and mitigate disruptions to organizational effectiveness and efficiency in the face of COVID-19. We have worked together for years and have successfully improved the effectiveness of organizational performance of federal, state, and private-sector clients and are now bringing this expertise and experience to bear for new clients as they face unique organizational issues during the pandemic.

- ✓ Our team is totally dedicated to and experienced in solving the most pressing organizational effectiveness issues. Most recently our team has frequently focused on COVID-19-related problems and issues.
- ✓ Our team members have spent years in the government context addressing agency-level and government-wide management challenges.
- ✓ We seek to form close relationships with our clients, not just conduct projects for them, and we take the associated responsibilities and commitments VERY seriously.
- ✓ We are consultants, not contractors, and we work with our clients to keep our focus on the needs of the agency and taxpayer.
- ✓ Our consultants are experienced with both public and private-sector client challenges and have a long track record of success in identifying and mitigating them.
- ✓ We are large enough to provide the right people who are dedicated to meeting our clients' needs, yet small enough to give each client ongoing executive management attention.
- ✓ We are committed to providing technically effective, cost-efficient, timely, and at-a-distance solutions.



**“ The key to improved organizational performance is the ongoing employment of multidimensional interventions involving people, process, and technology. ”**

**—Francis J. Guillard**

*President and Co-Founder of the Experience Co-Creation Partnership*

## ABOUT COE AND COHNREZNICK

### The Center for Organizational Excellence, Inc. (COE)

Founded in 1984, COE was initiated to provide true value for clients in improving organizational performance. We have been recognized by Forbes Magazine Top Consulting Firm Award for multiple years and consult based on a set of values and standards that ensure our clients receive the best possible outcomes. Focusing our services on Organizational Effectiveness, Human capital, Data Systems, and Technology, we are known as an “honest broker” by our clients. We will not waste clients’ money by performing in a way that does not add value. We have staff members who care deeply about the service they provide and the meaningful results of their efforts.



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### CohnReznick LLP

From our origins in 1919, an innovative and client-centric culture has flourished at CohnReznick. We believe that this mindset defines us in many ways. First, we have an affinity for our clients — we understand your drive. Second, we recognize leadership — talent shapes the direction of the firm. And third, we view our success as a call to action — a means to improve our communities and be the go-to proactive strategic advisor solving our clients’ most difficult issues.



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Our position in the industry is notable. Today we rank among the largest accounting, tax, and business advisory firms in the United States. With a team of over 3,000 and an extensive footprint with international reach through global subsidiaries, we can effectively mobilize to serve you on a local, regional, national, and international basis.

The breadth and depth we represent in each of our practice areas can be leveraged on-demand to address your enterprise initiatives or to advance distinct opportunities. The ability to scale is matched by CohnReznick’s commitment to each client on an individual basis. Working with us means you work directly with our partners. A hands-on, consultative team and technical experts will respond to the intellectual needs of your organization, create a proactive service experience, and focus on setting and attaining goals.

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**“ Given the nature of the crisis, all hands should be on deck, all available tools should be used. ”**

**—Christine LaGarde**

*Former Chair and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund*