

COVID-19 Ready

Colorado Housing and Finance Authority
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

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It's often said that the best defense is a good offense. This defines Colorado Housing and Finance Authority's (CHFA's) COVID-19 experience. The organization's efforts to prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic began years prior to the first case being reported in Colorado. CHFA's success navigating the pandemic's uncharted path stemmed from a long-standing commitment to mission and strengthening business continuity through technology, operational efficiency, and culture.

Technology and Workplace Flexibility

Investments in technology require time to implement. Due to [multi-year investments in technology and infrastructure](#), the essentials were in place to support safe and secure remote working. In 2019 and 2020, these efforts were furthered by a [strategic focus on technology and training](#). User adoption of all IT equipment and applications was advanced by staff-focused trainings held on-site and virtually via online technology and eLearning. This was reinforced by an enterprise-wide Key Performance Indicator encouraging every employee to complete 40 hours of training.

Simultaneously, CHFA embraced greater workplace flexibility to align with the expectations of a younger and mobile workforce. [Policies](#) were updated to allow select business functions to work remotely with management approval. Prior to COVID-19, 80 percent of CHFA's staff worked remote at least one day per week, and half at least two-days per week. Over time, the shift allowed cultural norms to be established, fostering team collaboration and communication to support a productive remote-working environment.

CHFA's Pandemic Team

[CHFA's Pandemic Team](#) is a nine-member body tasked with maintaining business continuity. Led by CHFA's Human Resources Director, it is comprised of the Executive Team, IT Director, Marketing and Community Relations Director, Information Security Officer, and Asset Management Director, who oversees CHFA's facilities. The Team operates with a spirit of collaboration and a goal to provide a decisive, calm, and thoughtful direction.

The Team was positioned to launch due to business continuity trainings held annually to prepare CHFA to effectively respond to a variety of crises that, if realized, could interrupt operations. Testing of CHFA's [crisis management plans](#) occurred through both simulated and real-life events. These events allowed the Team to test staff communication protocols, remote technology and infrastructure including phone lines and VPN access. Findings identified and corrected would prove instrumental to helping the organization transition to mandatory remote working in response to COVID-19.

On March 5, the first confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported in Colorado. Five days later, on March 10, Gov. Jared Polis declared a statewide emergency. On March 12, CHFA held its first Pandemic Team meeting; taking swift action to guide the organization's response, and implementing voluntary remote working immediately. By Monday, March 17, the Team implemented mandatory remote working, nine days prior to Gov. Jared Polis issuing a mandatory stay at home order on March 26.

To implement mandatory remote working, the Pandemic Team worked quickly with division directors to identify essential personnel necessary to maintain on-site functions. A condensed on-site staff, comprised of less than 15 percent of all full-time employees, was established to maintain daily senior oversight, front desk mail and phone service, accounts payable and receivable, document delivery and

custodian functions, as well as building maintenance and security. CHFA's physical offices were closed to the public and guests.

Connecting in the New Normal

Frequency of communication was key to success. During the initial weeks of the crisis, daily Pandemic Team meetings were held virtually at 9:00am. Team members triaged resolutions to emerging business needs. Leadership Team meetings, typically held monthly, transitioned to weekly. [Meeting agendas](#) were restructured to ensure response efforts aligned with CHFA's strategic areas of focus: Culture, Internal Operations, Finance, and Customer. The frequency of All Staff meetings increased to monthly and were held virtually allowing chat functionality resulting in [high engagement](#). Managers were encouraged to schedule regular team check-ins to maintain connectivity. Weekly virtual Coffee Chats created a forum for unstructured "water-cooler" conversations among staff. CHFA's COO and CFO engaged in impromptu remote calls with staff members with no formal agenda, simply to provide direct and authentic leadership support.

Branding was established to anchor internal and external COVID-19 communication. Tailored messaging was sent to staff, customers, and partners. During a 17-week timeframe, 20 all staff communications were sent providing employees with updated information about the business, technology advancements and resources, and employee benefits available. Resource sites were created on CHFA's [intranet](#) and [external website](#) to serve as information hubs for all pandemic-related announcements. A staff-focused social engagement site called [CHFA Connects](#) was launched using Microsoft SharePoint. New content is added and emailed weekly to provide stay-at-home resources, physical and mental well-being tips, and positive-encouragement. The site offers users the opportunity to like and comment on posts similar to Facebook. Since launch, more than 70 article and image posts have been added to the site sparking engagement among 79 percent of staff, with a total of 3,473 page visits.

In addition, employee benefits were expanded to strengthen support during a time of stress. Temporary authority to fully cash-out Paid Time Off (PTO) balances for personal use or donation to a nonprofit was offered. An Emergency Equipment Reimbursement benefit was added offering up to \$150 in reimbursement for purchases necessary to support working from home. Trainings and on-site fitness classes transitioned to a virtual platform, ensuring that both professional continuing education, as well as Zumba and yoga remained available for staff.

A pulse survey was conducted among staff in June to measure satisfaction with CHFA's communication and employee support provided during COVID-19. The results were exceptional with 93.8 percent of respondents indicating they agree or strongly agree that "CHFA communicated a clear plan of action in response to COVID-19." Eighty-three percent (83%) of staff responded to the survey.

Mission Accomplished

At the core of every decision implemented was CHFA's ability to successfully fulfill its mission. Just as steps were taken to reinforce CHFA's culture and staff, business units were focused on providing exceptional and uninterrupted service to customers and partners.

To help the Executive Team and business units stay abreast of COVID-19's impact on customers, a [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) was created using Tableau. The dashboard merges external data released by the

state illustrating the location and number of confirmed COVID cases with CHFA data maintained in the organization's data warehouse. Data is updated daily, which allows users to have immediate awareness into business changes requiring response. Development of the dashboard was rapid and agile. CHFA's in-house IT team launched the dashboard within one-to-two weeks of the pandemic. Updates are continuous based on feedback from business units.

CHFA's Home Finance team launched a ["Fully Operational" campaign](#) to promote CHFA's ongoing ability to purchase loans, provide 24-hour compliance reviews, and offer conventional loan products. Communications were deployed via eNews, social media, and in trade association outlets. CHFA's business development professionals followed up with direct outreach to participating lenders to reinforce the campaign's key messages and address unique needs or questions. In addition, homebuyer education classes were offered online at no cost to participants. As a result, CHFA remains on track with production goals established pre-pandemic, surpassing \$1 billion in loans purchased as of mid-May. To further accelerate progress, eNotes, a technology solution designed to eliminate the need for physical collateral documents was escalated.

Likewise, CHFA's Community Development and Asset Management teams immediately stepped into action. Compliance monitoring adjustments were communicated to owners and managers as early as March 16 by [eNews and online](#). More than 100 attendees participated in a webinar to review process changes. In April, a [survey](#) was sent to all properties within CHFA's portfolio to track anticipated delays in rent payments and capture a pulse on tenant needs and concerns. Plans were implemented to conduct the 9 percent Low Income Housing Tax Credit round virtually. LIHTC applicants were trained on Microsoft Teams allowing them to present their applications to the Allocation Committee as would normally occur. Award decisions were announced on May 15, the same timeline as was planned prior to COVID-19, without any delays or technology interruptions impeding an applicant from participating in the process.

CHFA's Corporate Giving Committee, charged with supporting mission-aligned organizations, has donated [\\$506,800 to 51 organizations](#) located across the state. The Committee prioritized support for food banks, meal delivery, rent and mortgage assistance, and homeless quarantine and supply needs. The Committee has transitioned its annual Golf Tournament fundraiser to an online donation drive to raise \$75,000 for Mt. Carmel, a nonprofit helping veterans with housing, health, food, and employment assistance. Additionally, previously planned staff Days of Service have changed to support Habitat for Humanity's Well Wishes Campaign, making welcome cards and online messages of celebration for new families moving into their homes.

COVID Ready

COVID-19 continues to inform CHFA's daily operations. The response efforts have permeated across all aspects of CHFA's business, requiring each team member to leverage their strengths, unique skills, past training, as well as an ability to see clearly during great uncertainty. The result is a stronger, more nimble organization. Mandatory working requirements are poised to continue through August 31. Yet, CHFA is looking ahead to anticipate the months and years beyond, always seeking to remain ready to meet the next challenge.

Visual Aides: [COVID-19 Ready Video](#); [COVID-19 Dashboard Video](#)