

Staying Connected

New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

HFA Staff Contact

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STAYING CONNECTED
Keeping MFA Staff Working and Engaged While Sheltering in Place

An Instant Crisis

In the afternoon of March 23, New Mexico’s governor ordered that all New Mexico residents were to shelter in place due to the threat of the coronavirus. In addition, all non-essential businesses were to be closed beginning the next morning, Tuesday March 24, and essential businesses were instructed to keep as few employees on-site as possible. Although MFA was deemed to be an essential business, the organization is a quasi-governmental agency with heavy state government involvement and oversight. Therefore, in response to the governor’s objectives and in an effort to keep our staff safe, MFA’s executive team decided to have as many staff as possible work from home beginning the next morning. The race was on to equip MFA’s staff of 84 to telecommute.

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Beyond the Herculean IT task of getting all but a handful of staff instantly telecommuting, there loomed another, possibly more difficult question. How would we keep our staff engaged and connected to our work and to each other during the weeks and months ahead while we were physically separated?

Background

After 44 years of existence with no telecommuting options, MFA launched a work-from-home pilot program in September 2019. Ten employees participated in the trial, which was met with a fair amount of skepticism and resistance. The 10 telecommuters worked from home one day a week from laptops using a VPN networking system.

In December 2019, with most of the initial bugs worked out, an additional 10 employees began working from home one day a week. Acceptance of the concept and trust in staff’s ability to be productive at home grew, and in January 2020, the pilot program became permanent and was opened to the remainder of the staff. Staff were able to work from home a maximum of two days a week; supervisors a maximum of one day a week.

When the governor issued her stay-at-home order, there were 35 staff members telecommuting one or two days a week. Many of them had just begun working from home and were still ramping up. The only home equipment they had was a laptop.

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In 2016, MFA designed an intranet as a way to increase internal communication. It was used primarily to convey office-related information and event notifications and to house forms and policies. The most personnel-centered section of the intranet was the searchable staff photo section and the occasional “Girl Scout cookies for sale” post to the virtual bulletin board.

Keeping Staff Working

When the decision was made to send the majority of employees home on March 24, more than 40 employees had never worked from home and, therefore, had no equipment or telecommuting training. In addition, many of the 35 employees who had been working from home for a few months or weeks prior to March 24 needed additional equipment to work effectively from home fulltime.

MFA's IT staff is made up of the chief information officer, two programmers and a technician. The CIO immediately placed an order for 60 laptops directly through Lenovo, which were received three days later. The IT team then set up shop in the board room to configure the laptops and install applications, with each team member working on 15 laptops each. The setup process, which included transferring each employees' files to their new laptop, was completed in one day.

The IT team prepared an equipment package for each employee that included a monitor, keyboard, mouse, headset and laptop that employees picked up from the office. Using remote-control software, the IT department worked directly with the employees who needed extra support to get them online and to help them begin working remotely.

Keeping Staff Engaged

The day the shelter-in-place order was given, MFA's Communications and Marketing Department began working with IT to design a new section of the intranet that would become MFA's virtual watercooler. Named "Bright Spot", the section would have six rotating topic blocks where the communications team would post items to generate discussion and where staff could create their own posts. A [humorous video](#) was created to explain to staff what Bright Spot was designed to do and to communicate the message: "Social distancing is not social isolation." Bright Spot was launched less than one week later.

Another opportunity for employees to connect remotely was through weekly all-staff WebEx meetings, which began the day after the stay-at-home order was issued. In addition, all employees were invited to sit in on the WebEx leadership meeting that are held every Monday morning. The leadership meeting, when MFA directors and supervisors review the previous week's activities and plan for the upcoming week, had previously only been open to the leadership team, with notes from the meetings posted to the intranet for staff review. Now staff would be there in real time.

In April, the decision was made to create another section on the intranet to house resources for employees to help them navigate the effects of COVID-19. The "Health and Wellness Toolkit" would have six categories: lifestyle; mental health; financial health; family resources; employee assistance programs and emergency numbers. There would be an anonymous Q&A section with questions directed to HR, and a topical sorting feature.

Results

All of MFA's programs have continued without interruption and with no disruption in workflow. We hear from our partners and customers that, except for no in-person meetings, their interactions with MFA staff have not changed.

The move to a telecommuting staff has had some long-term benefits. One is within MFA's accounting department, which had been very paper dependent. Within a couple of weeks, new paperless processes were put into place, including the use of electronic signatures. Not only did the changes allow department staff to work from home, accounting processes are now permanently more efficient.

In addition, the training and support that IT provided directly to employees initially and on an on-going basis has proved to be valuable. Not only have employees learned new technology necessary for telecommuting, but IT has used the one-on-one time for broader individualized systems training.

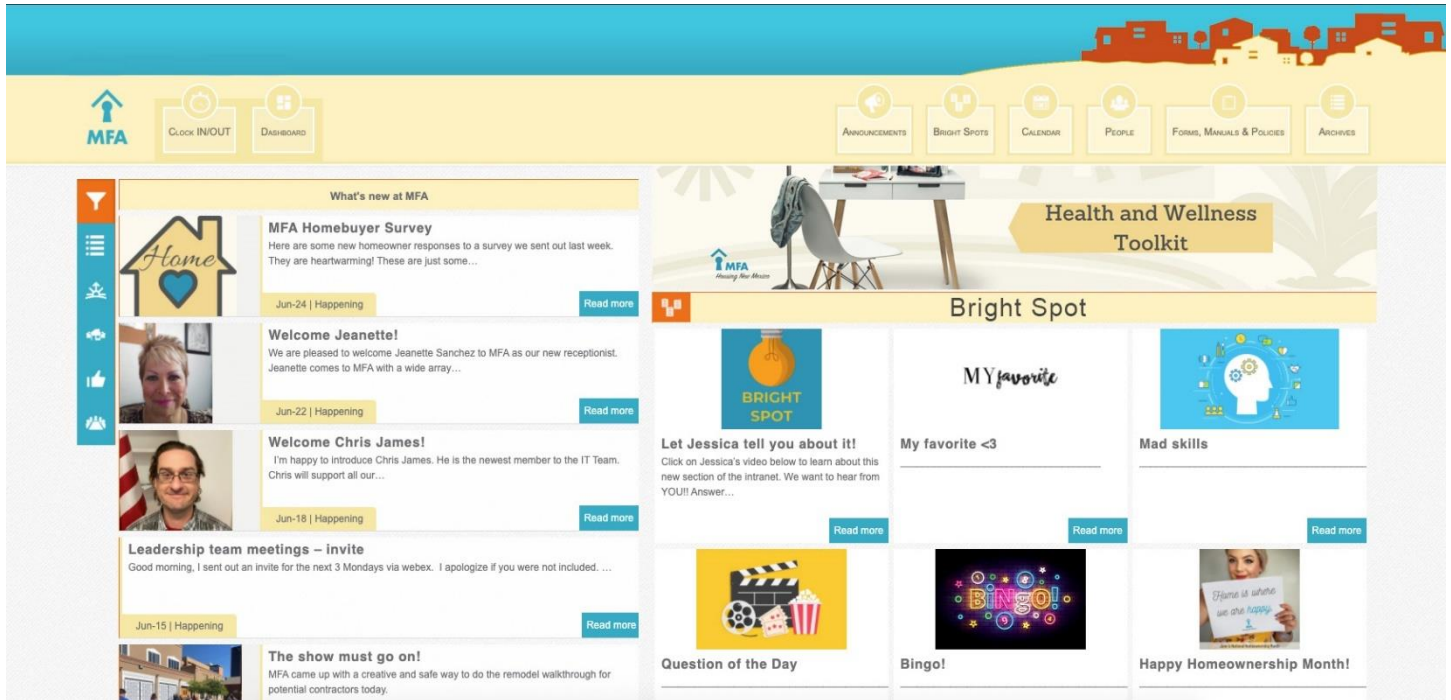
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In many ways, the MFA staff has never been more connected. Bright Spot has proven to be a communication channel that is fun, easy to use and effective. The communication department creates two to three posts every week. Just over three-fourths of the MFA staff participate on a regular basis, and almost all of the remaining fourth read the posts without commenting or posting. About half of the staff have created at least one original post featuring photos of pets, children, food, their home workspaces or life events like new babies or virtual family get-togethers. A big surprise has been the involvement from staff members who normally don't engage in group activities or team building exercises. Through Bright Spot, we have journeyed into each other's lives and homes. We have met their pets and their children. We have learned what sustains them and how they are coping with the "new normal."

Approximately 95 percent of staff are present every Monday morning for the virtual leadership meeting. Employees say that the meeting is their primary source of company-wide information. Virtual all-staff meetings are now held on an as-needed basis, which is usually every-other week. All-staff meetings have an open structure, and staff members say that they are grateful for the opportunity to be heard and to ask questions.

In May, after two months of working from home, MFA participated in a "Best Places to Work" contest sponsored by the publication "Albuquerque Business First." We have entered the contest many times, but this was the first time we scored high enough to win the award. It is telling that, in the middle of a major disruption in the workplace, employees said they were happier than ever in their jobs.

Bright Spot



Bright Spot is housed on MFA’s intranet; a screenshot is above. Below are samples of posts, contests and games that were designed to encourage interaction and team building. A sample of employee-generated posts are also below.

[A video](#) explaining Bright Spot to staff was the first post on the site.

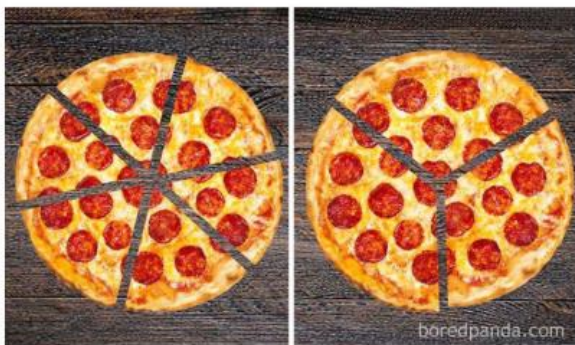
Question of the Day



Was there something you did or figured out that helped you transition from working in the office to working from home?



What TV series are you currently obsessed with?



What is a new recipe you've learned or meal you've been obsessed with during quarantine?

Share with the rest of us below!



QUESTION OF THE DAY

Without being able to go out and do things, game nights at home have become even more popular!...

What are some of your favorite games to play?



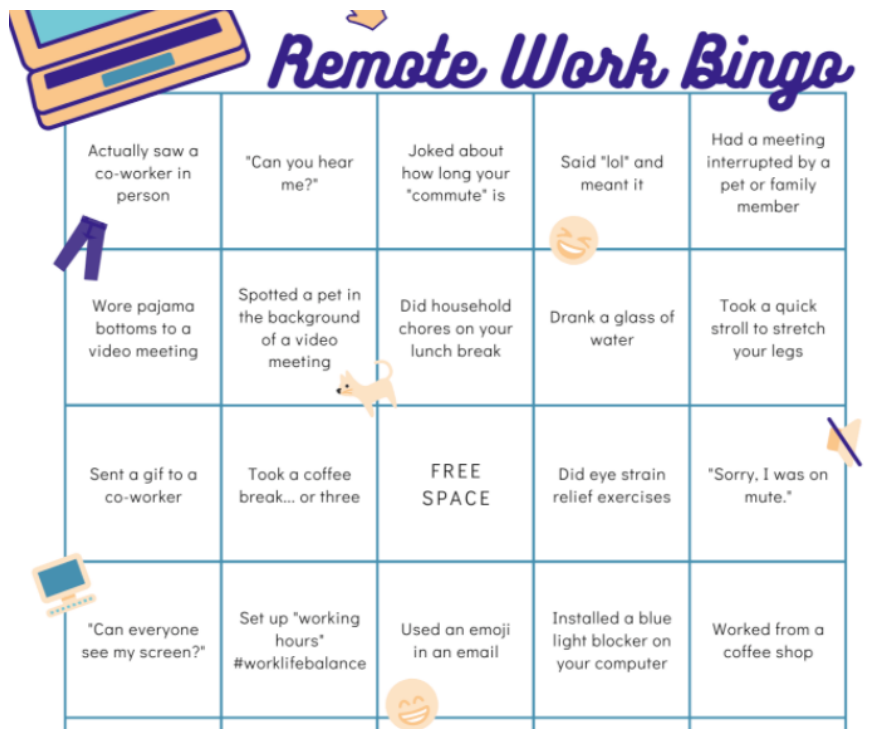
We all have our guilty pleasures, and now is the perfect time to embrace them during quarantine.

What are your guilty pleasures? Don't be shy, this is a judgment free zone! 😊

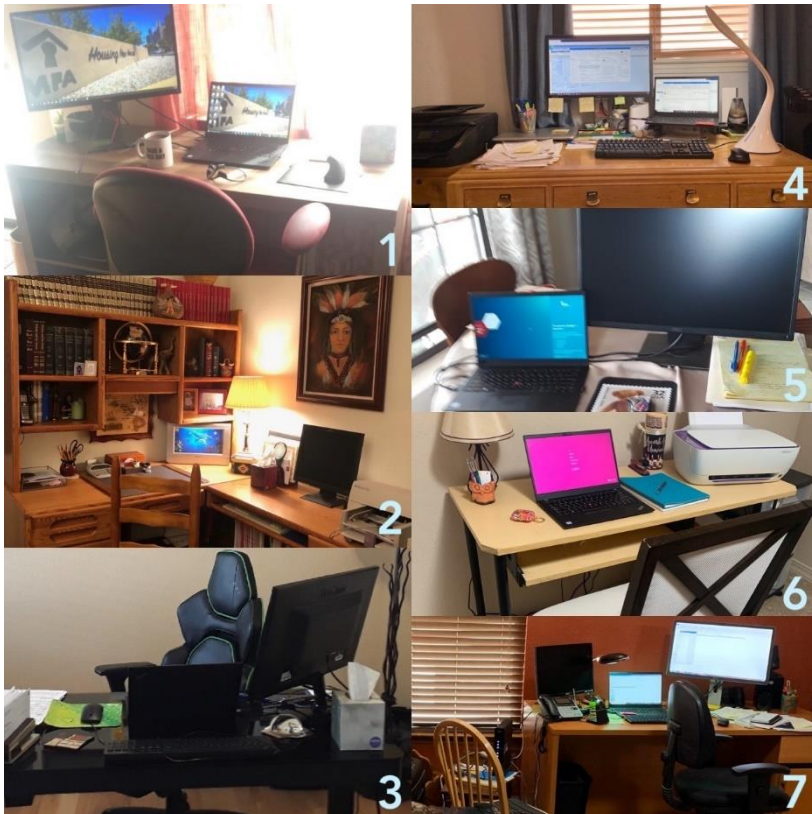
What are some restaurants you miss eating at?



Contests and Games



Can you guess which office space belongs to each MFA staff?



Can you identify your coworkers?



Post each photo individually or combined in a Word doc and upload the document to a comment

Virtual Scavenger Hunt

Post one photo for each six items.
Post all six to finish the hunt!

Someone (or a waving selfie) waving from 6ft away- remember to smile!







Your lunch.

Something orange.

Yours or someone else's work space.

A plant, flower, or tree.

Your water bottle- remember to hydrate!



Guess Who?



Let's build a playlist together!

Jun
3



Jessica Cage



35 Comments



Music soothes the soul!

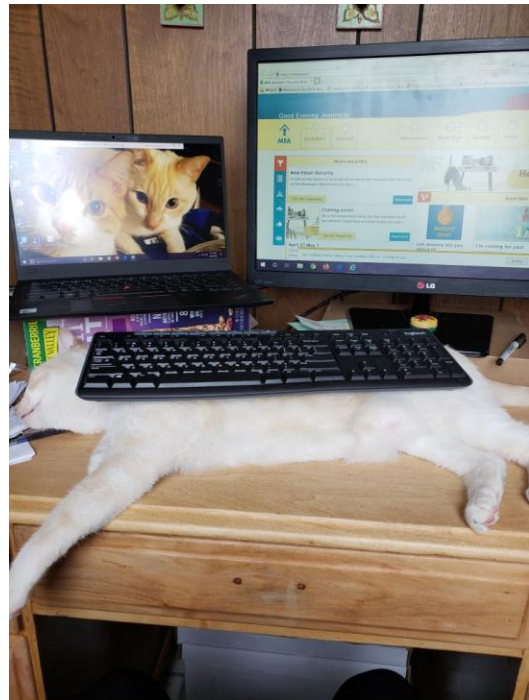
What's a song you've had on repeat lately?

Title and Artist

Employee Posts



This is my personal assistant Hazel. She brews a mean cup of coffee; is great at answering my calls and loves sitting in my lap.





Without a commute, I get to walk out of my “office” and watch this bucket of joy with his cat, “Cheerio”! They do this for hours all over the property.



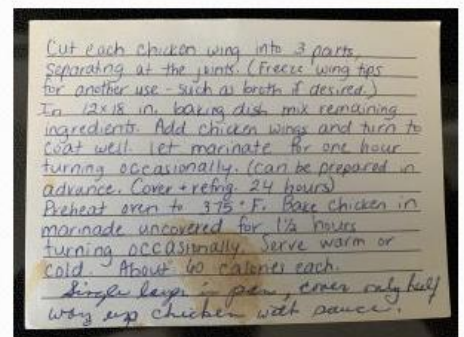
Babies are doing great and growing fast! Mama is around — even in the box with them sometimes — and is obviously feeding them. They don’t seem afraid of me at all, but I try not to get too close. Except for today when I needed to brand their little condo. 😊



So, when my granddaughter asked me if I liked working from home, I told her it was nice but I missed my friends at work. Before leaving my house that evening, she handed me her two dollies and said I could "borrow" her two BFF's so that I wouldn't be alone all day. She made it very clear that they I could only "borrow" them. I may not have dogs or cats or birds, but I have babies!

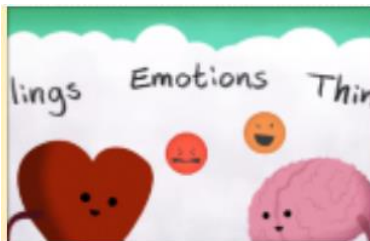


My new co-worker, Alexa, is really getting on my nerves. She thinks she is soooo smart and is always correcting me.



Health and Wellness Toolkit

The Health and Wellness Toolkit is housed on MFA's intranet above Bright Spot. It is a resource for employees as they adjust to the current situation.



Combating Isolation

[https://www.mass.gov/info-details/maintaining-emotional-health-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak#combating-isolation-and-loneliness-](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/maintaining-emotional-health-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak#combating-isolation-and-loneliness)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

TAGS: Emotionalhealth

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)



Handling Stress

How to Manage Stress During Significant Change Webinar:
<https://community.virginpulse.com/managing-employee-mental-stress?submissionGuid=fb1ec0ee-d67e-4ca9-85fc-5fbfec9de4e4> Stress Assessments
TSG myStresstools Flyer Generic

TAGS: Emotionalhealth

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)



Managing Financial Anxiety during COVID-19

How to Manage Financial Anxiety During the COVID

TAGS: [Financial](#)

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)



Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) info

The Solutions Group Sponsored by Presbyterian Healthcare 505.254.3555
ComPsych Guidance Resources Sponsored by The Hartford
www.guidanceresources.com 800-964-3577

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)



Staying Healthy during COVID-19

Staying Healthy and Safe at work during COVID-19

TAGS: [fitlife](#)

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)



Building a Healthy Work from home Routine and Environment

Watch the video

TAGS: [work from home](#) [work life balance](#)

Wellness Kit

[Learn More...](#)

Weekly Staff Meetings

