

Supporting Our Team While Fulfilling Our Mission

Rhode Island Housing

Management Innovation: Human Resources

HFA Staff Contact

Mary Kate Harrington

mharrington@rihousing.com

UNPRECEDENTED AND CHALLENGING TIMES

COVID-19 may have closed many businesses, but as the statewide housing finance agency, our work is too important for us to stop, especially as Rhode Islanders need us now more than ever before. While supporting our customers and residents is of the utmost importance, we can't do the great work we do without our staff.

The global health pandemic has completely upended the way humans interact and work. Within a matter of days RIHousing had to prepare and support our staff as employees transitioned to remote work while continuing our efforts to provide housing programs and resources to Rhode Islanders. There's no exaggeration to say that responding to COVID-19 has been one of the (if not 'the') biggest challenges this agency has experienced in our almost 50-year history. *While our organization has grown over the years, one thing remained constant: we worked together in our downtown Providence headquarters, utilizing physical access to one another, our customers and our partners to collaborate and succeed.*

This closeness allowed us to build a strong team that could have easily been upended with the transition to remote work. While the transition presented technological and resource challenges (setting up employees to work remotely while also providing laptops, monitors and other items to perform their work), it has created "social" challenges as well. Used to in-person meetings, collaborations around employees' desks and the ability to meet face-to-face with customers and partners, staff now had to learn a new way of doing their work, all while dealing with their own personal stresses relating to COVID.

SUPPORT THROUGH COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION, EMPLOYEE SUPPORT, TECHNOLOGY

Recognizing the challenges faced by our diverse employee population, our Human Resources team worked closely with our Information Technology (IT), Facilities and Communications departments as well as Executive leadership to *develop a responsive and supportive program to strengthen agency operations while ensuring staff had the information and resources they need to succeed and stay healthy.*

Developing a series of resources and communications tools, we've been able to keep staff connected and working while ensuring their own health and well-being. Our employee engagement and support effort centers around several key areas:

COMMUNICATION:

- *COVID-19 resources page on our employee intranet*
 - With little time to prepare, our team worked to develop a special resource section of our employee intranet. Serving as the "hub" of information, it includes employee policies and procedures, information on maintaining employee health and well-being, announcements and updates on the impact of COVID-19.
- *Ongoing updates via email, intranet posts and teleconferencing*
 - HR staff have supported employees via a series of e-communications offering support and resources for staff, as well as updates on COVID-19's impact on our programs and work, plans for reopening of our office building and links to resources to support mental health and well-being.

- HR held an all-staff teleconference to review updates and information relating to remote work, as well as the procedures and protocols that RIHousing has put in place based on the guidelines from the State, CDC and RI Department of Health.
- *Team Building*
 - Use of Microsoft Teams to ensure connectivity of staff; replacing in-person staff meetings with virtual meetings via Teams ensures staff remain connected and engaged.
 - Managers are encouraged to hold regular “check-ins” with their staff and offer opportunities for “fun” virtual meetings (examples include remote Yoga, trivia and more.)

INFORMATION:

- *Protocols, Policies, Tips and Management Tools*
 - Via a series of newly created Policies, Procedures and Management Tools, our HR team worked with our Legal department to provide guidelines for remote work, roles and responsibilities of managers, etc.
- *Creative and informative signage throughout the building as staff return to the office*
 - A return to the office for staff necessitated the development of a series of informational signage to ensure employee health and compliance with state and CDC guidelines. Working closely with our Communications team, informational and engaging signage was developed to promote social distancing, awareness around health screening and reporting.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT:

- *Webinars, Supportive Services and Programs for Employee Health and Well-Being*
 - Promoting and connecting employees and their families to programs, trainings and services relating to mental health, wellness and mind-body well-being.
 - Promotion of financial services webinars and trainings to support employee financial health.

TECHNOLOGY:

- *Development of a new Employee Screening App*
 - With a short time to prepare for required daily employee screenings prior to a return of staff to our office building as part of the state’s reopening efforts, Human Resources worked closely with our IT team as they created an app to push out a daily COVID screening questionnaire using a free Microsoft product. The questionnaire is sent through RIHousing’ Agility system (already in place for emergency notifications to employees) and was created and tested in the span of about one week.
 - The link to the daily screening is sent to all staff via our Agility system. The link is sent to employees’ work email, personal email and personal cell phone. If anyone is coming into the office, they are required to activate and complete the screening. HR staff remotely monitor the incoming screening questionnaires against a daily employee log tracked through our fob security system. Any staff member fobbing into the building must have a matching, completed screening questionnaire. Any employees who do not have a smartphone can access the screening in the lobby using an iPad.
 - Developed in response to state guidelines requiring employee screenings, the app is especially notable as we deployed this with a quick turn-around, no additional costs,

linked two existing platforms, utilizing a creative approach to avoid the purchase of any new software. Developed in-house, the app meets all state requirements for screening, ensures employee confidentiality as only HR staff accesses the information, can be done remotely so as not to require additional on-site staff to be present, is easy to update and adapt as new rules and regulations are put into place.

- Employees appreciate the fact that our HR team has spent the time and energy to ensure safety as a top priority. The app gives staff a sense of security as they return to the office.
- *Deployment of Remote Technology and Support*
 - We deployed a record 77 of laptops and provided extended IT service hours to all employees working from home.
 - Additionally, we created employee access on the RIHousing.com entrance point for all employees to use the Business Continuity page of the intranet to connect to all applications by Division.
 - Use of 'softphone' system to allow employees to make outgoing calls from their work phone numbers when using their personal cell phones.
 - Committee and Board meetings held telephonically in order to conduct business crucial to the continued work of the organization.
 - Training and support of staff in use of Teams and other remote technologies to ensure business continuity and connectivity.

THE "NEW NORMAL"

Three months into the "new normal" and we are thrilled to report that we've been able to build an effective "bridge" to support our staff, maintain strong teams, support remote work, and employee health and well-being.

Utilizing existing communications channels and technology, RIHousing has been able to keep our staff informed, healthy, and safe during the COVID-19 health crisis. With no additional cost for staffing or technology, we have been able to provide employees with the support and resources they need to succeed in meeting the emerging and evolving needs of our customers while ensuring their well-being.

Like our sister HFAs, we are asking our staff to work harder, work smarter, and innovate, all while dealing with the challenges of working remotely with little time to plan. As we now transition to some return to the office environment, we are committed to continuing our efforts to support our employees with a combination of in-office and remote programs.

WHY IT'S AWARD-WORTHY

We're proud of the fact that despite the challenges and a transition to remote work, we've been able to support our employees and preserve what makes RIHousing such a great place to work: our sense of community! Utilizing existing outreach channels, technology and staff input from our HR, IT, Legal and Communications teams, we've developed an effective and no-cost way of supporting staff and keeping them engaged. As we respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on residents and the housing landscape of our state, we need the experience, expertise and dedication of our team in order to move forward.



Management Innovation: Human Resources

Supporting Our Team While Fulfilling Our Mission

Invest.

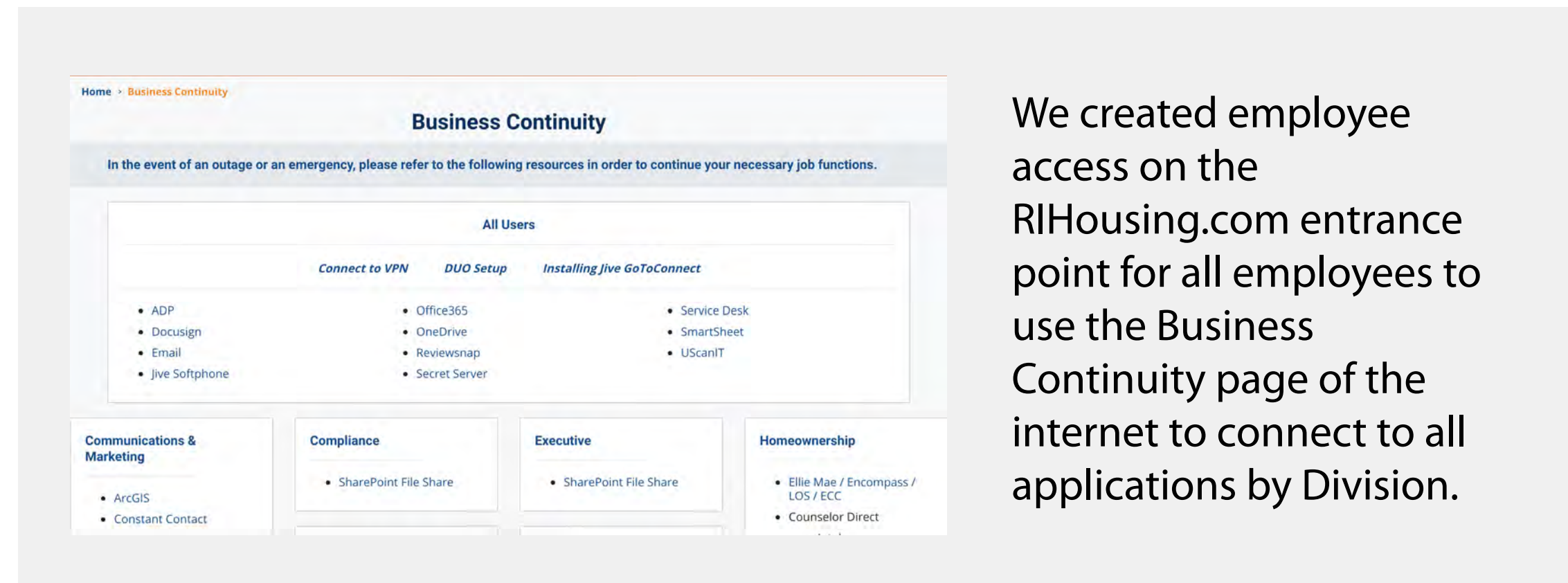
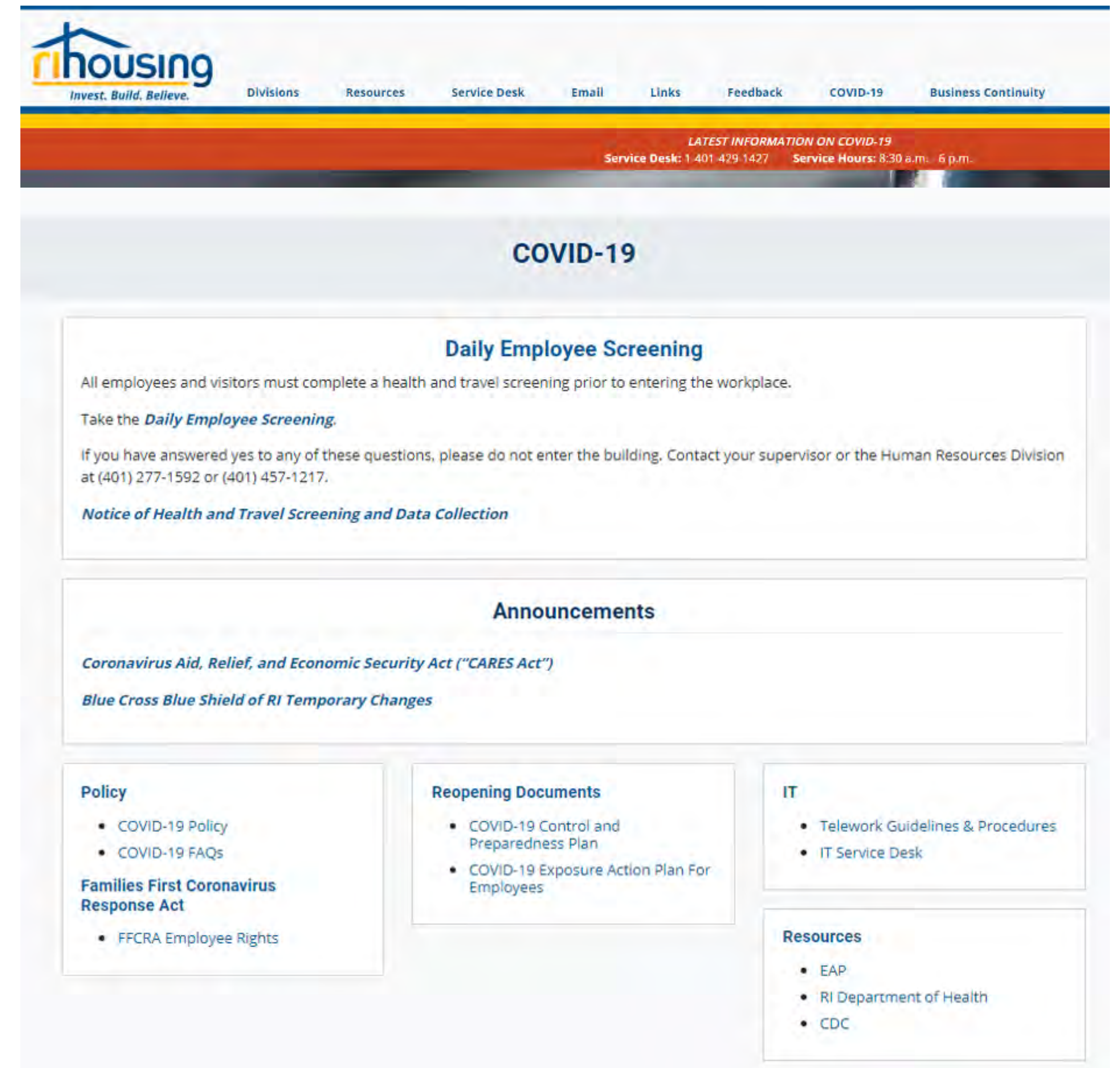
Build.

Believe.

COMMUNICATION

Development of COVID-19 Employee Intranet

New banner added to home page of our employee intranet, prominently displaying link to the latest staffing information relating to COVID-19 as well as contact information for our Service Desk for assistance.



We created employee access on the RIHousing.com entrance point for all employees to use the Business Continuity page of the internet to connect to all applications by Division.

COMMUNICATION

Ongoing 'Agency Updates' to all staff from Executive Director

Important Reopening Information



To: RIH All Employees

Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 3:41 PM

This message is high priority.

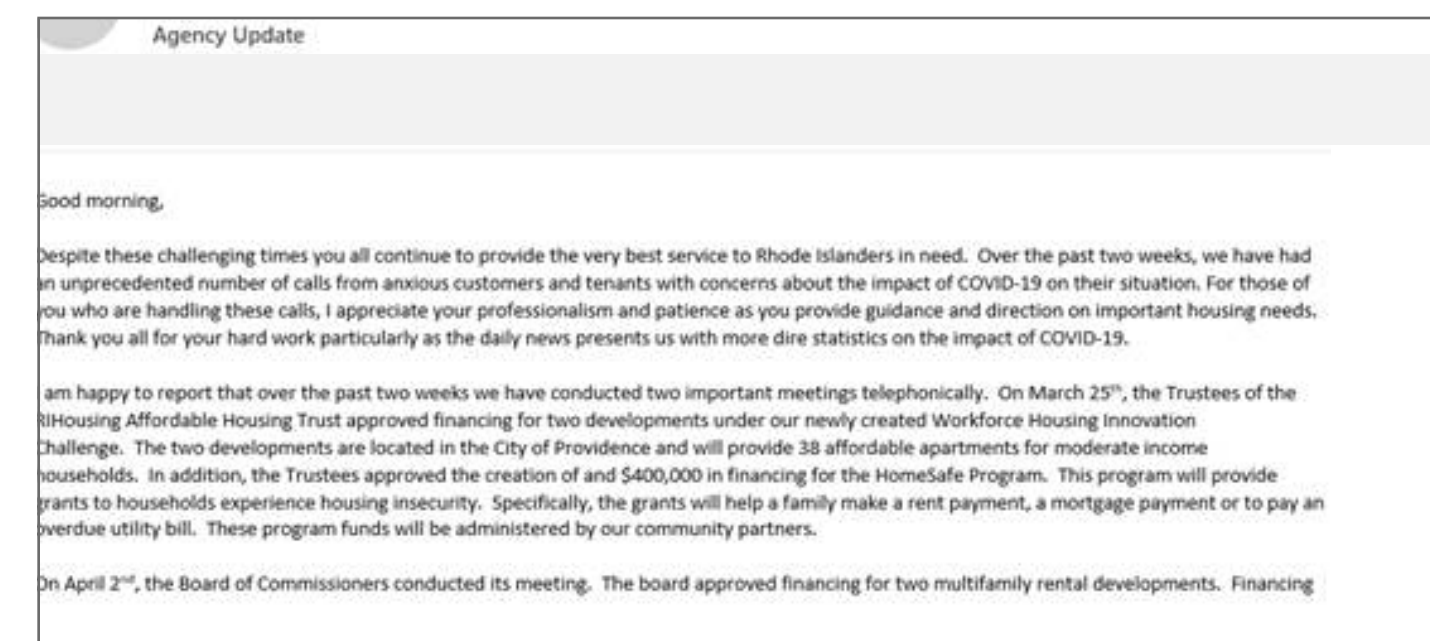
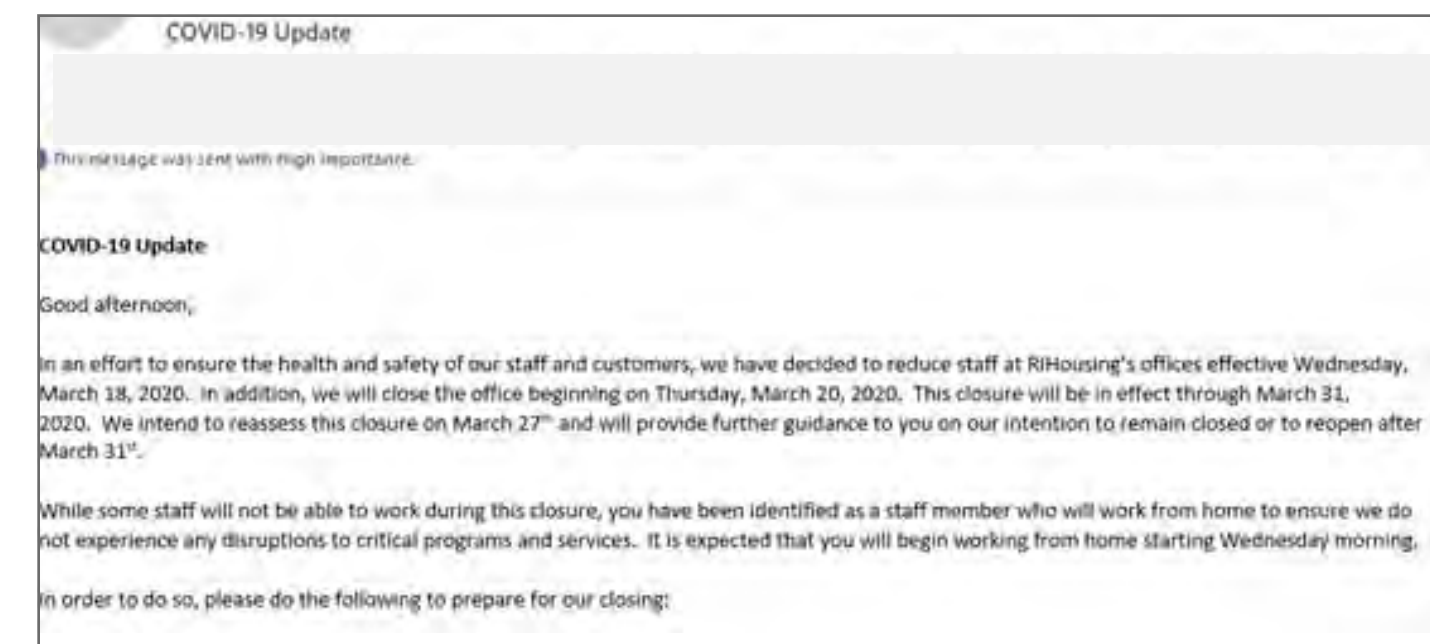
Dear Colleagues:

I hope this message finds you and your families doing well and staying healthy. I want to provide you with an overview of actions that RIHousing is taking to protect its employees as some of you are re-entering the workplace over the next few weeks.

We have recently completed our Control and Preparedness Plan and Exposure Action Plan which are required by the State for businesses that are currently operating or intending to open in Phase I. The plans detail responsibilities of managers and employees; office entry and screening procedures; hygiene etiquette and protective measures; cleaning protocols; social distancing controls; exposure protocols; communication and training; and confidentiality. All protocols and procedures are in accordance with State regulations and CDC guidance. Please review all COVID-19 documents and resources prior to May 18th on the intranet page at: <https://employees.rihousing.com/covid-19>. Please check this page often for updates.

Important information that I want to bring to the attention of staff currently working in the office and employees that will shortly be returning to the workplace:

1. Stay home if you are not feeling well or leave the office immediately if you become ill during the work day.
2. You will be **required** to complete a screening **prior to entering** the building. The screening will be sent through our Agility system via email and text. **Do not enter the building until you have completed the screening.** If you are working from home for a day, you do not need to complete the screening. However, even a quick stop into the office will require you to complete the screening. For those who have allergies or other symptoms that may align with the COVID-related health screening, do not enter the building – contact your manager and HR. HR will review the matter to determine if you can enter the building.
3. **You are required** to wear a mask or face covering that covers your mouth and nose when entering the building and while outside of your personal work space, including hallways, stairways, rest rooms, kitchen, copy area and meeting rooms. Masks will be available at the door if you need one.



INFORMATION

Creation of helpful documents

RIHOUSING TELEWORKING TIPS

Here are some tips to help maximize your remote work experience:

- (1) **Set and keep regular office hours.** Most people who work from home find they work too much rather than too little. Other remote workers struggle to keep a regular schedule -- working a few hours one day and pulling an all-nighter the next. One of the great things about being a remote worker is that you can set a schedule that works for you. Create a schedule that will allow you to get the most done with as few interruptions as possible. Don't forget to include appointments, meetings, and allow some time for unexpected interruptions. Some interruptions can't be avoided. Client deadlines may unexpectedly require extra hours. Family obligations can interfere as well, especially if children are home during the day. Do your best to set work hours and stick to them.
- (2) **Plan and structure your work day.** Structure your workday to maximize efficiency. If you know you focus best in the morning, resist the temptation to check email until 10 a.m. or later. A quick review of your calendar when you first start work can set you up for a productive workday. Make a list of your most important tasks before you move on to less urgent business. If possible, shut your office door (if you have one) to signal to others that you're working and don't wish to be disturbed (if possible).
- (3) **Increased communications.** Stay in touch during the workday through phone and/or email. You are expected to be available during business hours or the hours discussed with your supervisor.
- (4) **Meetings.** Employees must be available to attend scheduled meetings and participate in other required office activities at the home office, as needed. If you are required to have meetings with your team, clients, etc., make sure that you try to schedule everything to take place back-to-back, within the same time block. That way, you don't have to stop and start what you are doing to go from one meeting to another.
- (5) **Set aside a designated work area.** Consistency is an important aspect to working from home. Try to work at the same spot every day. It could be a spare bedroom that you've turned into a home office, a desk located in the corner of the living room or even the dining room table. Make sure your workspace functions efficiently for you, your business and your style.
- (6) **Take breaks.** Schedule time for frequent breaks throughout the day. Rise from your desk, stretch or walk around the house or down the street. Take a lunch break and enjoy a midday meal. If you need a little socializing, call co-workers or friends. If possible, spend time with

Remote work is new to RIHousing and its staff. To support staff as they embrace remote work, Human Resources developed a series of "Teleworking Tips," COVID Protocols and Procedures.

Creation of a Series of documents with important and timely COVID-19 related information for staff, including COVID-19 Policy, COVID-19 FAQs, Exposure Action Plan and more.



COVID-19 Policy (Updated 6/1/2020)

Purpose:

In response to increased cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019), the following policy establishes procedures for supporting employees who may be exposed to, infected with or impacted by COVID-19. The goal of this policy is to maintain a safe and healthy workplace, protect the privacy of infected persons, and let all employees know their rights in discharging leave and remote work options related to this disease. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act ("FFCRA") was recently signed into law and became effective as of April 1, 2020. FFCRA provides employees with paid sick or family leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. FFCRA's provisions will apply from the effective date through December 31, 2020. Further guidance on the FFCRA provisions



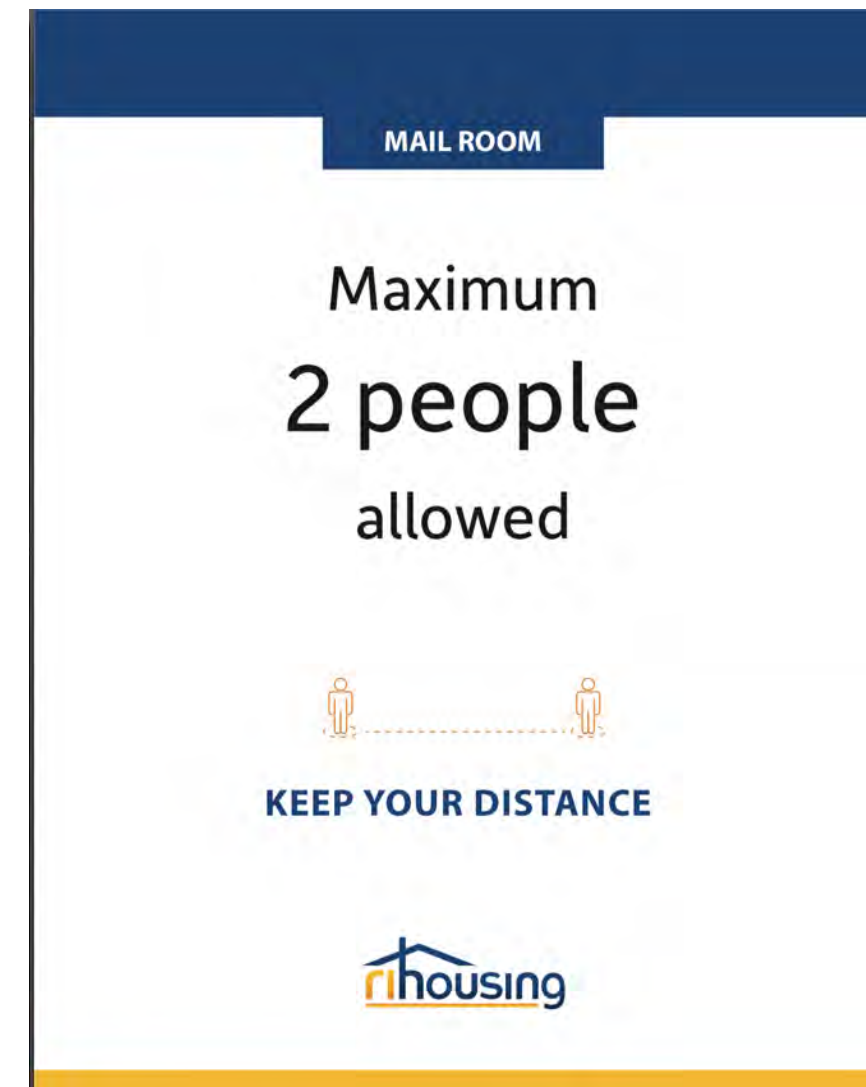
(Updated 6/8/2020)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About RIHousing's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response

This FAQ provides information to employees of RIHousing regarding the workplace and COVID-19. This document serves as a supplement to RIHousing COVID-19 guidance and documentation. All employees must review in full the policies, procedures and protocols implemented by RIHousing (and located on the [COVID-19 page](#) on the RIHousing employee intranet) to ensure they have an understanding of the procedures to be followed involving the coronavirus and the workplace.

SIGNAGE

Creative and informative signage throughout the building as staff return to the office



ALL EMPLOYEES AND VISITORS MUST COMPLETE A HEALTH AND TRAVEL SCREENING PRIOR TO ENTERING THE WORKPLACE.

Have you been diagnosed positive with COVID-19?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you been in close contact (less than six feet) with anyone with COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

*Close contact has been defined by the CDC as within 6 feet for a period of 10 or more minutes.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you or anyone in your household been directed to quarantine or isolate by the Rhode Island Department of Health or a healthcare provider in the past 14 days?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you or anyone in your household traveled internationally in the past 14 days?

☐ YES ☐ NO

In the past 14 days, have you traveled to Rhode Island for a non-work-related purpose from another city, town, county, or state that currently has a stay-at-home restriction, a shelter-in-place restriction, or a similar restriction, declaration, or announcement due to a COVID-19 outbreak?

Excluding travel for medical treatment, to attend funeral or memorial services, to obtain necessities like groceries, gas, or medication, to drop off or pick up children from day care, or work on your boat.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you experienced any of the following symptoms in the last three days that are not explained by known allergies or a non-infectious cause?

- Fever (of 100F or higher)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Recent loss of taste or smell

☐ YES ☐ NO

IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS, PLEASE DO NOT ENTER THE BUILDING.

FOR EMPLOYEES: CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION AT _____ OR _____

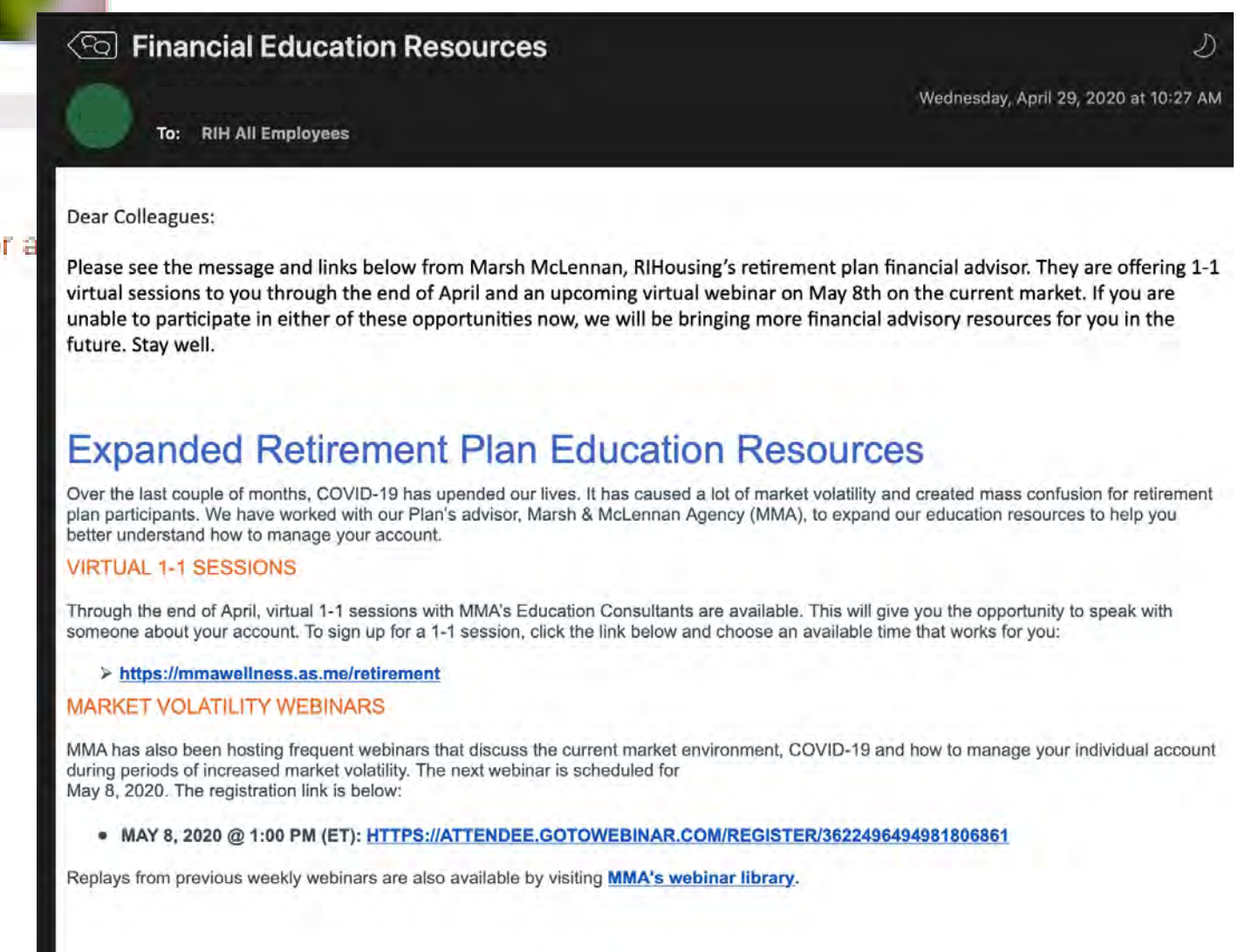
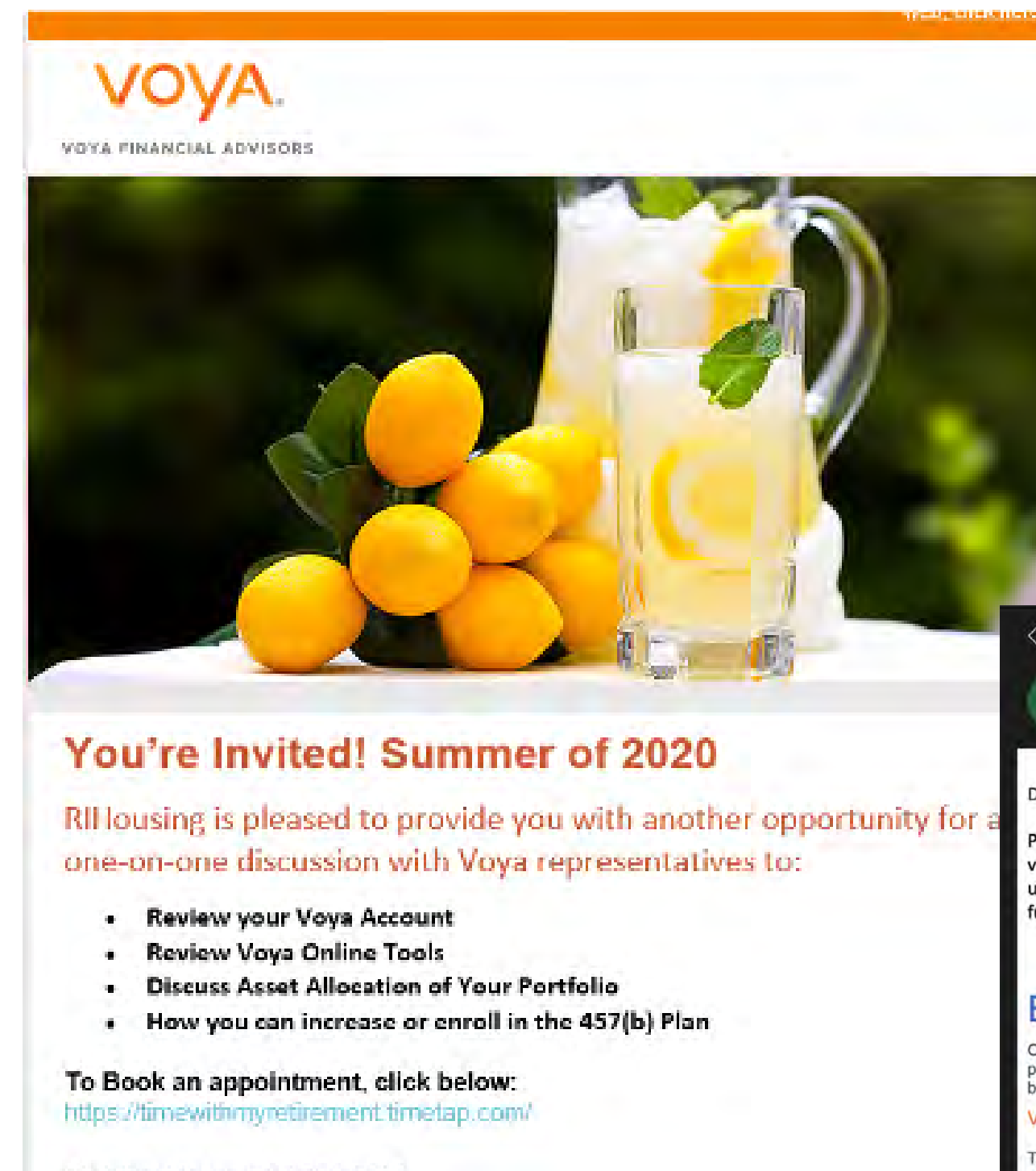
FOR VENDORS AND VISITORS: PLEASE **DO NOT** ENTER THE BUILDING, YOU SHOULD RESCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT.

Thank you for helping us stop the spread of COVID-19.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

Information resources include policies and procedures updated to reflect the reopening of the state as well as important resources to promote employee health and well-being.

Supporting employees' fiscal health

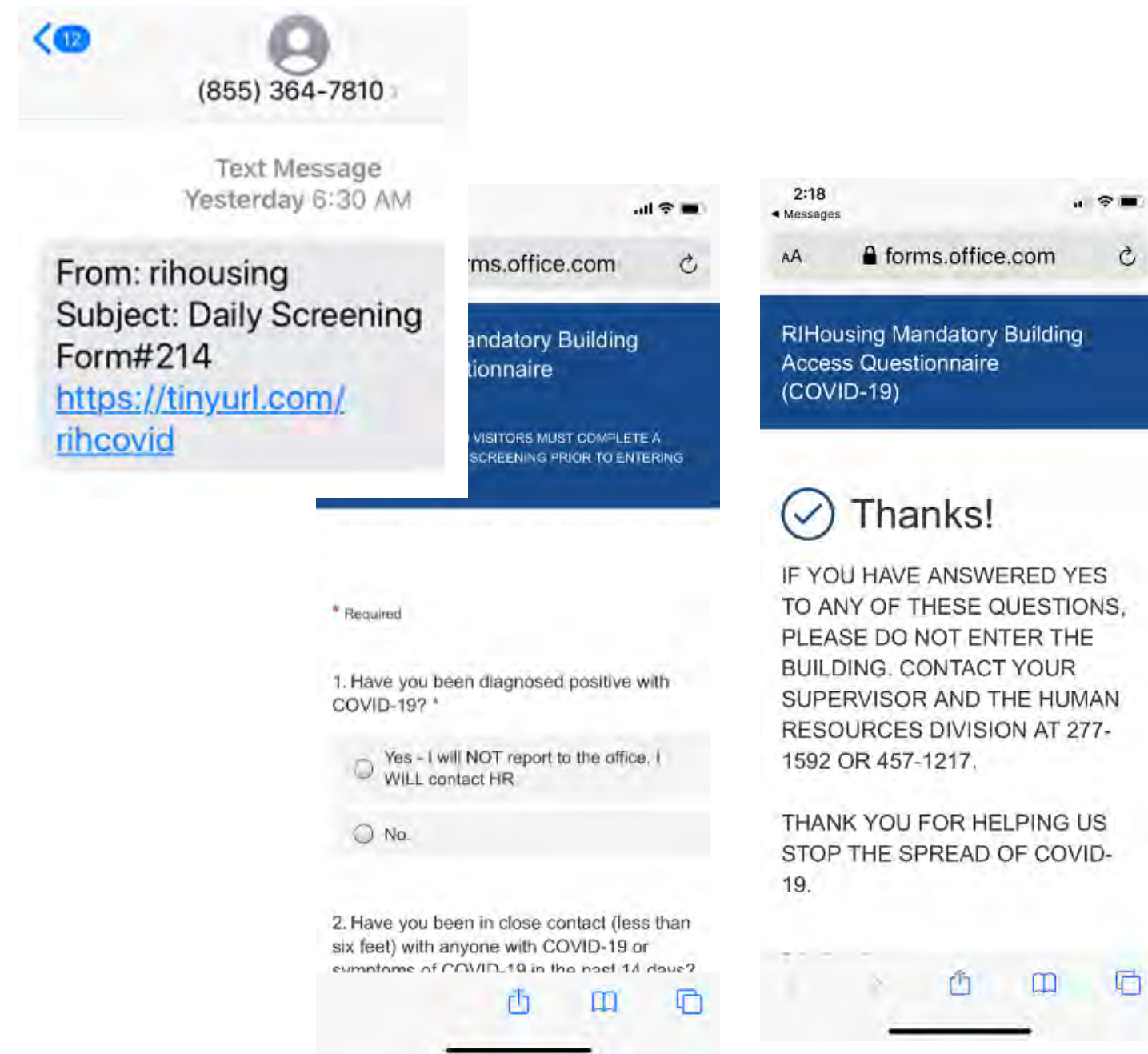


A series of emails promoting employee health and well-being ensure staff are fully supported during this challenging time

TECHNOLOGY

Screening App

The electronic screening app helps us keep staff safe and ensures employee privacy while complying with state guidelines.



Employees receive text and email reminders every day for the Daily Screening Form. The screening app is mobile friendly.

RIHousing Mandatory Building Access Questionnaire (COVID-19)

ALL EMPLOYEES AND VISITORS MUST COMPLETE A HEALTH AND TRAVEL SCREENING PRIOR TO ENTERING THE WORKPLACE.

Hi , when you submit this form, the owner will be able to see your name and email address.

* Required

1. Have you been diagnosed positive with COVID-19? *

- ☐ Yes - I will NOT report to the office. I WILL contact HR.
- ☐ No.

2. Have you been in close contact (less than six feet) with anyone with COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

*Close contact has been defined by the CDC as within 6 feet for a period of 10 or more minutes. *

- ☐ Yes - I will NOT report to the office. I WILL contact HR.
- ☐ No.

3. Have you or anyone in your household been directed to quarantine or isolate by the Rhode Island Department of Health or a healthcare provider in the past 14 days? *

- ☐ Yes - I will NOT report to the office. I WILL contact HR.
- ☐ No.