The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Guide to working from home

General guidance, tips, and resources for working from home



Working Remotely

We recognize that, for many of you, working from home is new and can feel difficult. With this guide, we have collected resources, guidance, and tips to help you stay healthy, engaged, and productive.

This guide is for **you** – to help you **set up your workspace**, **stay connected to each other,** and **manage your time and well-being.**

Guide to working from home



Set up your workspace



Stay connected to each other



Manage your time and well-being



Set up your physical and virtual workspace

Set up your physical workspace

Take the time to set up a workspace that is safe, comfortable, and where you can work effectively.



A safe and secure space

Find a safe space to work – good ventilation, proper lighting, good ergonomics, and comfortable furniture are just a few things to consider.



Minimize distraction and disruption

If possible, aim for a space with minimal distractions (noise or clutter) and disruptions. We realize this can be challenging with others home as well.



A place for equipment and materials

Identify a ‘work base’ where your equipment and materials can remain undisturbed, even if you shift locations during the day.

For questions about office, please refer to the Modern Workplace Program to get the most recent guidance

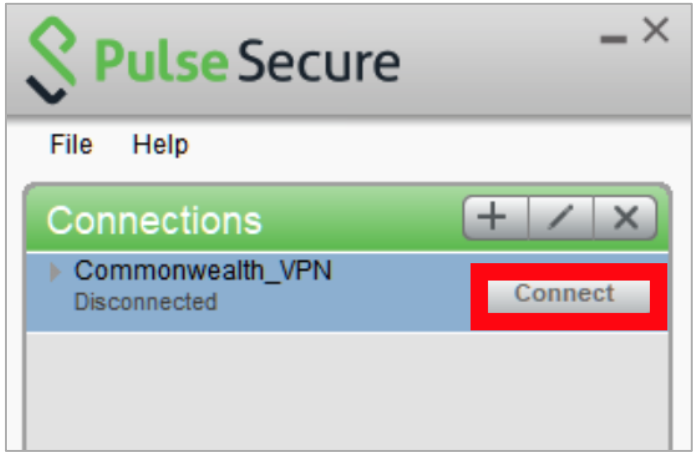
Set up your virtual workspace

Continue to collaborate and be productive from wherever you might be working.



Use your best connection

When using a wireless connection, consider your distance from the router and interferences in between that and your workspace that may affect your connection quality.



Think secure, be secure

You can use Microsoft apps and sites with a standard internet connection. To securely access internal resources and work with confidential data, connect via VPN.



Mobile when you need it

Installing Microsoft apps on your phone is a great alternative when your local internet is experiencing high usage that affects your connectivity.

- Set up your mobile apps safely.
- Learn more about Microsoft mobile apps.
- Your device should already be connected to the Commonwealth VPN but, if necessary, you can still learn how to connect to the Commonwealth VPN on the Telework site.

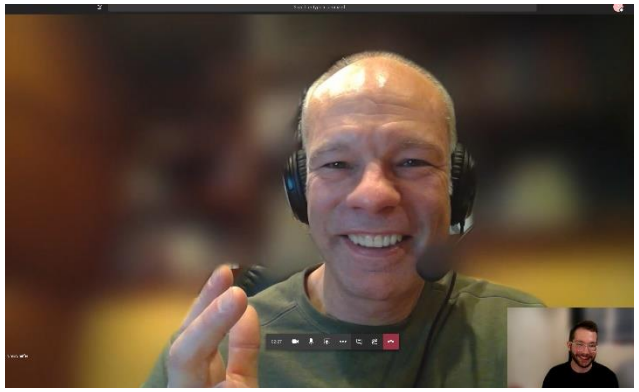
Get your video ready

Using a webcam can help you connect with colleagues when you are not together in person



Video on (when possible)

It makes for more inclusive meetings and helps you to be present and engaged in the meeting. It can also help to see facial expressions to increase connection and understanding.



Check your surroundings

Be aware of what is in view. If using Microsoft Teams you can use ‘blur my background’ to minimize distractions and protect privacy.



Camera framing

Point your camera so your eyes are ~2/3 up the screen and your face is visible.

Video can sometimes strain limited bandwidth. Consider turning your camera off if the connection is poor.
Need additional resources for using Teams video? Learn more on the Office support site.



Stay connected to each other

Communicate

There are many ways to stay connected while working from home.



Communicate often

Make it a habit to connect frequently with your colleagues and stakeholders. If using Microsoft Teams you can open a channel for ongoing conversations or start a shared document to share progress.



Make space for connection

Be sure to check in with colleagues every now and then. Use Teams as a platform to chat or meet with others, or even share tips on how you work from home!



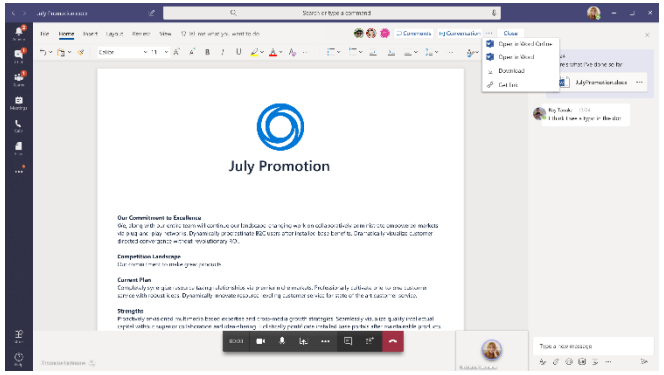
Virtual ‘water cooler’

Make up for missing "hallway talk" or connecting over coffee by using Teams for chat messages or calling. Set yourself a reminder to check in with people regularly.

Channel conversations in Teams are great for keeping the whole team connected.
Watch the Quick Start Video for a walk-through of Microsoft Teams.

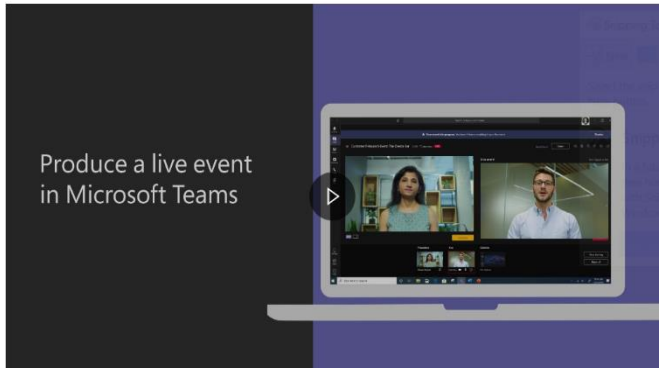
Collaborate

Don’t miss a beat by using technology to connect and collaborate, regardless of location.



Ideate and iterate – real time

Share the content your audience needs to see with screen sharing, and work to edit in real time with coauthoring in Microsoft Teams.



Switch to digital events

Keep your events on the books with Microsoft Teams live events. Live events allow you to broadcast video and meeting content to large online audiences.



Virtual ‘huddle’

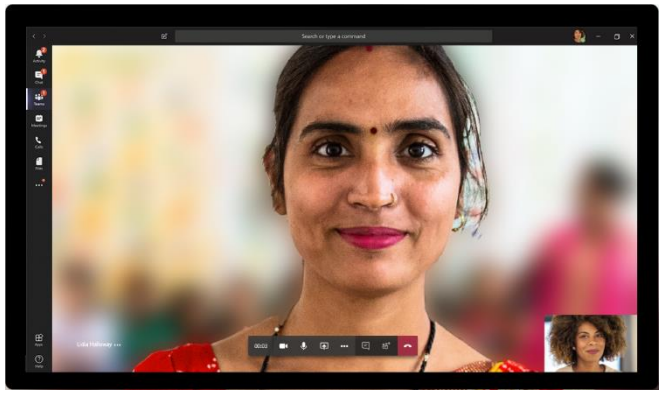
Quick meetings are effective at getting everyone on the same page, quickly. Schedule a call to get the same impact of a quick in-person connection.

Watch training on how to produce a Teams live event or a guide on the Modern Workplace site.
Send materials in advance of the meeting and make sure your content is accessible.

- Use the Accessibility Checker in Office 365 and be sure to turn on subtitles in the Slide Show tab when sharing slides in PowerPoint

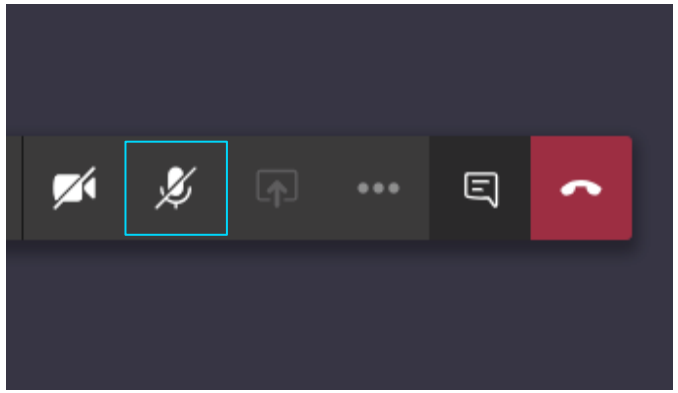
Lead inclusive online meetings

As you move your meetings online, take these steps to make them productive and welcoming for everyone



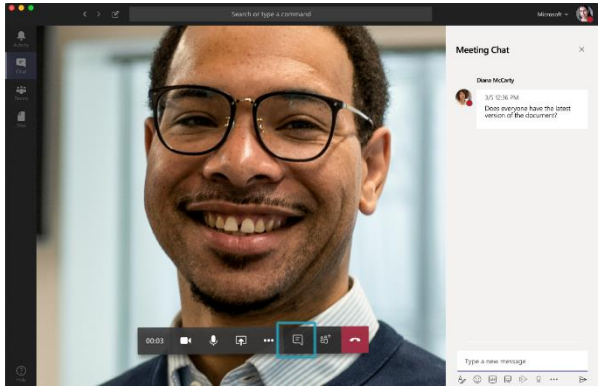
Be present and respectful

Limit multitasking during meetings. Turning on your video can show that you are paying attention and allow you to focus on the person or people on your call. In Microsoft Teams, you can blur your background to reduce distractions.



Pause for others to speak

It can be hard to find space to speak in a meeting, and even harder when everyone is virtual. Make sure there's time and opportunity for all voices to be heard.



Monitor meeting chat

People may not feel comfortable breaking into the conversation or may be having technical difficulties. If using Microsoft Teams, check the meeting chat often for comments.

Make sure all meetings have a virtual "join" option to create an online conference room.

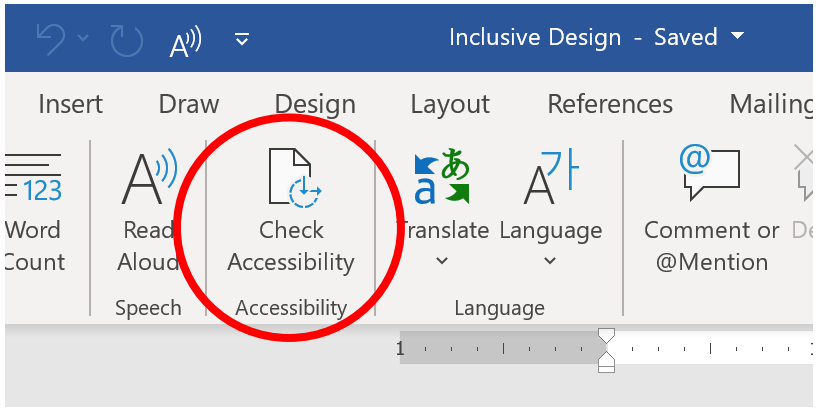
Think about accessibility

Follow these simple tips to be inclusive of colleagues and customers with disabilities.



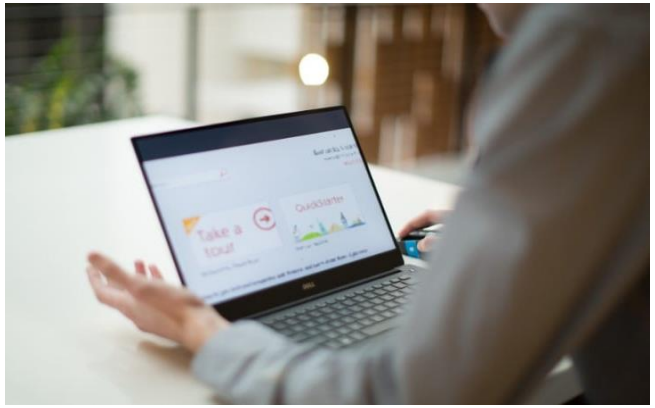
Include captions if possible

If enabled for live captions, or hosting a Teams Live event, you may be eligible to turn on captions. This makes for a more inclusive environment for all attendees.



Make sure your content is accessible

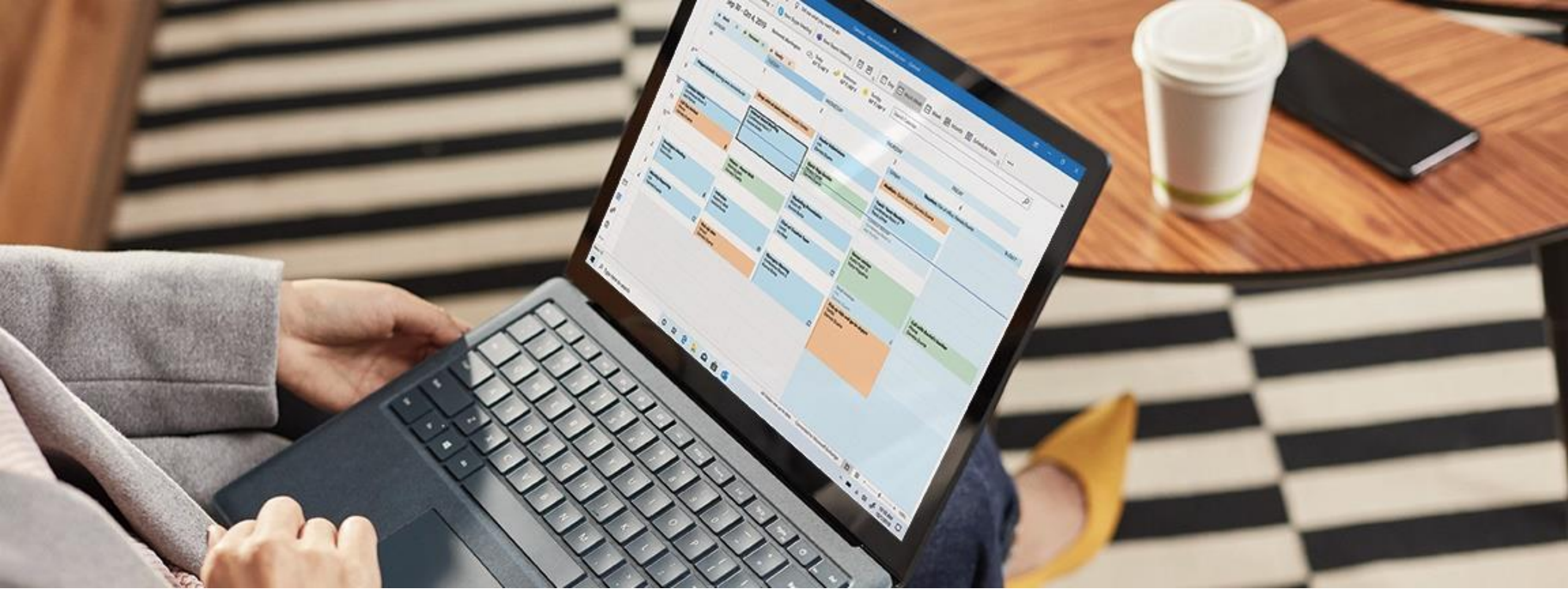
Send materials before your meeting and use the Accessibility Checker to check that your documents are inclusive to people with disabilities. Remember ~70% of disability is invisible; you never know who needs accessible content.



Make Windows 10 easier to see

Is your cursor hard to see? Need to increase font size or distinguish colors more easily? You can change all of these and more in the Windows 10 Ease of Access Center.

For more tips on accessibility, check out Microsoft's Accessibility site
If you are a person with disability needing assistance with accessibility features, contact the Disability Answer Desk



Manage your time and well-being

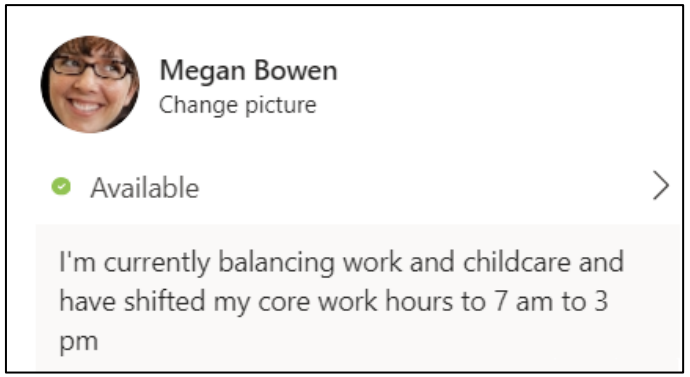
Share your schedule and signal availability

Set healthy boundaries, manage interruptions and be clear about when you are available.



Set expectations for availability

Your daily schedule or even the hours that you work may change while working from home. Set expectations with your team (and those you live with) around your availability during the day.



See what is important

With everybody working from home, you might see an increase in messages. Use the settings available in Microsoft Teams and Outlook to customize notifications and prioritize conversations.



Set boundaries

It can be a challenge to switch 'off' from work when you don't leave the office – or switch 'on' your workday when you don't leave the house. If needed, set clear intentions about work time and home time to avoid burnout or being 'always on'.

Set a status message in Microsoft Teams and update your calendar to indicate if you are free or busy.
Set quiet hours in Microsoft Teams to limit notifications to your work hours and turn Focus Assist on in Windows 10.

Role of the manager

Managers play a key role in the success of their teams, especially during times of uncertainty and change. Working from home is a unique opportunity to demonstrate your expectations as a manager.



Model

Model the work from home habits in this document. Be a positive example and make sure to reinforce inclusion. Check in with your employees, ask for perspectives and identify any areas for improvement.



Coach

Help each person create their best and most productive work from home environment. Understand any business concerns your team may have and support their efforts at working in new ways. Be curious and ask questions that empower employees to find their own solutions.



Advisor

These are unusual times with unanticipated challenges and may require more frequent check-ins. Students may be out of school. Be sure to manage expectations, offer support and take time to understand the unique needs of every employee.

Leverage this article to learn more about how to stay available for your team.

Take care and be mindful

In challenging circumstances, we need to remember to take a step back and focus on our health, wellness and mindset.



Don’t forget to take breaks

It can be difficult to remember to take breaks. Use your calendar to turn meals and breaks into appointments so you get regular reminders. Block time on your calendar for exercise and fresh air – or just time to step away from your workspace.



Work-life harmony

While working from home you may need to occasionally redirect your time and energy to your loved ones. Strike a balance that works for your situation, keeping your manager and employees apprised of your work hours and availability.



Check in with yourself (and others)

It’s important to check in with yourself and be mindful of how you are feeling. Anxiety, loneliness and other feelings are perfectly normal. Be sure to give yourself time and attention so you can remain healthy and productive. Check in on others within your community.

Refer to Commonwealth's guide for help on setting up telework and other tips.