

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# What You Need to Know for Return-to-Office Planning

ERGs, Well-Being, Benefits, and Beyond

# Different Return-to-Office Models

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After three long years of uncertainty, pivoting to remote or hybrid work models to accommodate public health concerns, and people shifting focus for better work-life balance, some companies are wondering how to competitively position their return-to-office plans while continuing to support employee well-being. When trying to determine the right option, consider what employees are saying, company data, and the current company culture. Seramount's research has uncovered the top six return-to-work models and have weighed the pros and cons of each:



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## Remote

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All employees who are not required to be in a building to complete their jobs are employed as work-from-home employees full-time.

### What to Consider:

- Remote workers report working longer days which can lead to burnout.
- A workforce spread out across time zones can impact workflow
- Differences in technological infrastructure can impact work



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## Flexible Hybrid

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Employees can choose their location and working hours based on their priorities for the day

### What to Consider:

- Finding time for in-person collaboration may be difficult
- Employees will struggle feeling seen by leadership
- Remote workers might not feel included in hybrid meetings



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## Fixed Hybrid

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The company sets the days and times employees are allowed to work remotely or go into the office. Some companies will leave these days set up for specific teams to allow for flexibility based on team needs.

### What to Consider:

- Inability for individual work-life balance
- Potential loss of productivity if employees and their teams are not able to work in an optimal setting that accommodates their needs



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## Remote-First

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These companies offer the option to the employee to work from home full-time or go into a (usually reduced-size) office or co-work space if they are located near one. Going into the office is entirely up to the individual employee and is usually tracked through an internal system so that companies know where their employees are located on a daily basis.

### What to Consider:

- Potential for employees to feel isolated if no one goes into the office regularly
- May bring increased challenges to maintain the company culture



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## Office-First

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Employees are expected to be on-site four to five days a week but may select a few days a week or month to work remotely.

### What to Consider:

- It may be more difficult to track when employees will be in the office, as this model allows for more randomization of work-from-home structuring.
- It may not allow for the level of flexibility employees want, which could lead to higher attrition rates.



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## In-Office

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Employees do not have the option to work from home, regardless of situation or job responsibilities.

### What to Consider:

- Companies that choose this model may risk higher rates of attrition and may lose key knowledge workers because of lack of flexibility
- Employees who are required to return to the office full-time after working remotely have been shown to have higher rates of burnout

# Ways to Support Culture and Belonging

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There are many factors that can impact the employee experience when a company makes a choice to implement hybrid or remote workplaces. They include [ensuring company culture remains consistent and employees can have valuable interactions with their teams](#) while ensuring managers are appropriately equipped to mitigate performance biases, as outlined above. Having strong ties to company culture encourages a sense of belonging, which has been shown to be a key reason people stay with their workplaces through periods of transition. Programs offered through ERGs and mentorship are two of the top ways organizations can engage and support their employees.

## ERG Programming

Over the past three years, companies have needed to motivate employees virtually. In Seramount's report, "[The Future of ERGs: Are Affinity Groups Still Necessary](#)," many respondents noted there are still few options and capabilities in their companies to take ERGs virtual. These respondents noted that for future evolution of ERGs, more virtual access would allow for greater buy-in and engagement from employees—especially if the company operates on a global scale. Companies should try to tailor their ERGs with a virtual-first mindset because events and opportunities through ERGs can be offered with intentionality around accessibility and flexibility. Seramount recommended in the report the following ways for companies to engage a virtual, and perhaps global, workforce:

- Ensure events are marketed to as many employees as possible. Companies can do this through email and internal messaging platform campaigns, through notifications at company-wide town halls, and via ERG general meetings.
- Reflect on issues with a global perspective when applicable. Even if a company is not global in nature, pulling in knowledge partners with a global lens can help diversify thought practices in the organization.
- Engage audiences with different accessibility tools to improve engagement, such as sharing recorded events or encouraging conversations after sessions. This may allow more people to learn and develop from the offering, thus providing more chances for employee visibility and networking.

## Mentorship in Hybrid and Remote Environments

With the shift to more virtual and flexible workplaces, companies may be thinking about how to be more agile in terms of developing their high-potential employees. Mentorship programs can do just that, and over the past few years, they have [shown to be equally impactful](#)—if not more so—as in-person programs. Recent research on virtual developmental relationships indicates that [this form of mentoring can be more egalitarian](#), with visual status cues of organizational hierarchy and physical stature being minimized via video-based conversations. Additionally, with many of the social issues and pressures pervading historically excluded talent groups, virtual engagement can decrease anxiety about in-person meetings, creating more buy-in from these employee populations, allowing them to excel in the workplace and feel more supported.

While virtual mentoring can be a great program to add to a company's toolbox, it is important that the [details of the programming be thought through with intentionality](#). Without in-person chances of meeting to catch up in hallways or informal drop-by chats to check in, greater support will be needed to establish trust and rapport in these virtual relationships. It is also important to consider email overwhelm, and screen fatigue as likely impacts on these relationships, as both can cause the mentorship group to become more task-oriented and expediency-driven.



Diversity Best Practices members have access to the [full guide](#) on our website. If you would like to become a member, [contact us](#) to learn more.



# How Can Seramount Help?

## Our DEI Research Partnership Offers Evolving Research and Advisory Services to Support Rapidly Changing DEI Needs and Priorities



### Three Pillars of Service to Help DEI Leaders Effect Change

#### Rigorous Research with a Global Reach

Deploying a Proven Research Methodology to Identify How CDOs at Any Company, Anywhere in the World Are Making Change Happen

- ✓ Annual Research Initiative
- ✓ Resources to Educate Stakeholders and Accelerate Impact
- ✓ Custom Research to Answer Your Up-at-Night Questions

#### The Collective Experience of DEI Leaders at the Center

DEI Leaders Guide and Shape Our Search for Breakthrough Ideas, then Pressure Test What We Find

- ✓ CDO Roundtables and Experience Labs
- ✓ DEI Practitioner Roundtables and Hot-Topic Webinars
- ✓ Regular Convenings to Build Global DEI Leader Community

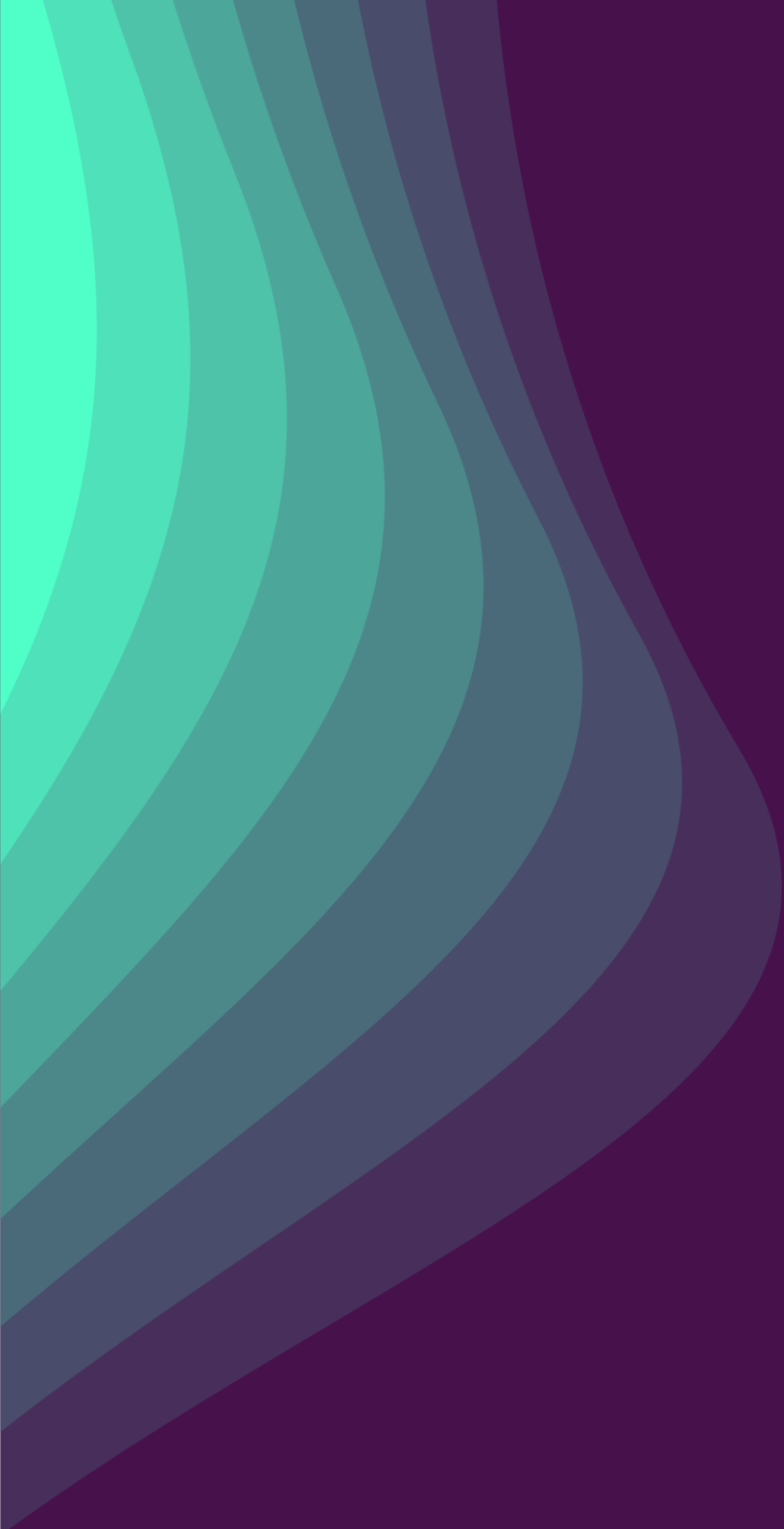
#### A Commitment to Applying Lessons Learned

Supporting You in Getting Buy-in For Change and Customizing Implementation of Lessons Learned

- ✓ Access to Expert Advisors to Increase Your Capacity
- ✓ Partner Intensives Bring Insights to Your Broader Team
- ✓ Proactive Planning to Drive Progress on Your Priorities

▶ Learn more about how the DEI Research Partnership can propel your DEI strategy forward by scheduling a call with one of our experts.

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