Gett.

The ultimate guide
to getting

Back
to the office

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In many parts of the world, the summer of 2021 will see a mass return to the office. With vaccination rates rising and cases falling, many workers are excited to interact with their colleagues again, even if it'll never be quite the same.

As an office manager, HR manager, personal or executive assistant, you've been tasked with preparing the office and your team for the return to in-person work. The fact that it's been so long since you stepped foot in the office only adds to the awkwardness.

Where will everyone sit? Should there be capacity restrictions on the lunch room? Does everyone need a vaccination or negative test certificate? Should your company supply thermometers to reception? There's a whole lot to iron out.

For this guide, we've done our best to take everything into consideration. Read on for guidance towards getting your team back to the office safely and happily. Plus, find a checklist that pulls everything together at the end.

What's in this guide

Getting back to the office after months of all-remote work

One recent survey found that almost 40% of employees would consider quitting if they had to come back to the office full time.

Apple, a tech company notorious for its refusal to allow office employees to work from home, has announced that employees must work three days a week in the office, beginning in September. However, many Apple employees want even greater flexibility, and would rather come into the office only one or two days a week.

The differing desires of employees and varying requirements of departments can lead to a lot of confusion. It's important to not attempt to just plow through all of this confusion, but to operate with empathy and integrity.

Collect feedback from returning employees

The first step to getting back to the office should be to talk to employees. Regardless of what the widely published surveys say, what do your employees want? You could send out a simple questionnaire to everyone in the office, and hold a focus group, with plenty of representatives from different departments.

Here are some questions that you might want to ask:

1. If given the choice, how many days per week would you prefer to work in the office?

2. Do you have any concerns about returning to the office?

3. How can we better support your return to the office?

4. How can we better support your remote working days?

5. Do you feel comfortable with team-building activities and company events?

Refusing to listen to your employees could result in a negative backlash, including a high employee turnover and a disintegrated company culture.

> "A portion of the planning will involve getting my employees' take on what they want and need in the office. Surveys will be sent to get a feel of what needs to be done. Whatever I decide, the important thing is to disseminate the information to all employees a week before we return! This will ensure that things stay organized even during the transition."
>
> **Rachel Klaver,**
> Co-founder of Identify Marketing

Focus on your company's big vision

Your company's vision should help guide you as you bring people back to the office. Rose Gailey, a return-to-work and organizational culture expert told Business Insider that the past 15 months "have highlighted the idea that culture is not about the place you work — it's about the spirit of an organization."

Don't sacrifice your company culture in the push to get everyone working from one place again. Make sure to examine company values, and consider how you could work these into any policy decisions. If the nature of your products or services does greatly benefit in-office work, use this to your advantage. Remind returning employees of what you do for customers, why that matters, and why your customers need you.

What is the hybrid remote work model?

Hybrid remote working simply means that there's a mix of both in-office and remote work.

The pandemic ushered in new, never-before-seen levels of remote working. People who used to be in the office were suddenly WFH. Now, with the worst of this particular pandemic (hopefully) behind us, many executives and leaders want to see people come back to the office, because of improvements in collaboration and communication.

But, workers have gotten a taste of remote work life. And while they may not want to work from home five days a week, they also don't want to completely give up remote working. Enter the hybrid remote work model. While some companies are returning to a full five days in the office, many are going hybrid.

"The first step was to discuss the options with our teams to get a general understanding as to how and what people expect as restrictions are lifted. From this, we decided to create a hybrid approach. Now, we're working with all staff members to iron out our hybrid model and what the ratios will be. For now, it looks like we'll stick with two days in the office, and three days out of the office. We have enough space for everyone to be back at the same time, so we're encouraging people to keep their two office days to Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays so we can interact more."

Robert Hourie,
Director of Data, Infrastructure, and Security Recruitment at GemPool
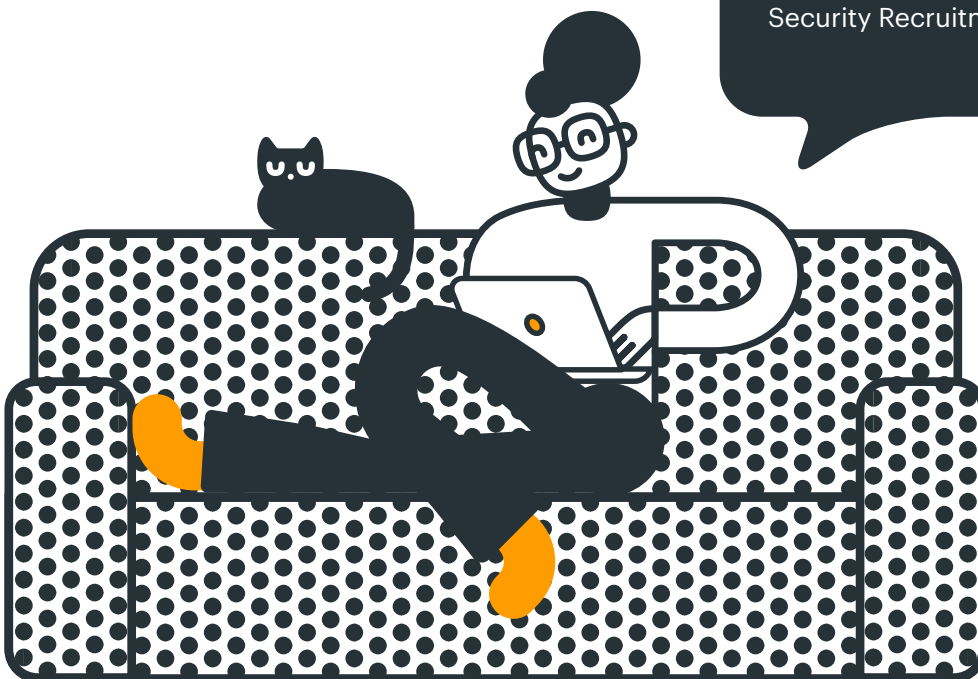
Managing hybrid remote work

At smaller companies, employees might each have their own desk and be able to come and go as they please. At large corporations, clearer policies will be needed to mitigate wasted office space as well as crowding and lack of available workspace.

Downsizing the office space

Whether you're allowing employees to choose the amount of in-office days or requiring a set number of office days, you might find that you can downsize your office space. If you encourage shared offices, workspaces, or hot desks in order to save money on the rental, make sure that you have daily sanitation procedures or services in place.

Flexible or dedicated work dates

At some companies, employees from certain teams can work from home as desired on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, but not on Mondays and Fridays. At first glance, this rule seems designed to limit unapproved extended weekends. So, if you do create policies, make sure that they are easy to understand and don't risk damage to your company culture by sowing distrust. Google, by contrast, is allowing employees to work with their managers to pick their two work-from-home days and their three work-from-the-office days. Google is also building movable pods with desks and whiteboards that can be rearranged as needed around the office.

Hot desk availability management

If you plan on having employees share desks as a method of saving on office rent, you'll need to make sure there are enough spaces available, and that everyone knows when they can and can't come in. Fortunately, there are no spreadsheets or massive calendars required. You can use a hot desk and hybrid work management software such as Envoy, Chargify, or Office Space to make it easy for employees to claim their spot.

"During the pandemic, we invested in a new, independent office space for our employees to return to, a space that wasn't in a managed building to minimise contact with other people. We have provided all desks with their own sanitation station and placed contactless sanitation dispensers around the building. Cleaning the office space is undertaken by a specialist company every weekend, but we also set time aside at the end of each day for every employee to sanitise their own workstation in preparation for the next day they are working in the office."

Simon Brisk,
Founder of Click Intelligence

"Prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, OnBuy was operating with a dedicated team of just 15 office-based employees. Despite several nationwide lockdowns and a complete transition from in-house to remote working, the business' immense success has led to numerous new hires across the company, resulting in over 85 members of staff and counting. With the further relaxation of lockdown restrictions on the horizon, we've secured larger premises to allow all employees to safely return to working in-house if desired. Until this move is actioned, we've implemented a booking system that gives staff the opportunity to work in the office using the 55 workstations currently available, providing them with extra flexibility where necessary."

Cas Paton, CEO of OnBuy.com

Preparing the office for your colleagues to return

**Are you ready for everyone to come back?
These are the key things you need to consider in order to prepare.**

Returning items to their owners

Your office won't go back to exactly how it was eighteen months ago. You'll have some remote employees. Others will have moved on. Desk arrangements won't be the same. This means that when you return, there will be a lot of stuff to sort out, including personal items left behind. To resolve this, take pictures of each lost item and add them to a Microsoft Teams Document or Google Doc. Then, share that with the company, and ask everyone to comment on the photos of the items that are theirs in order to claim them. Remind everyone three to four times, and wait a couple months before donating leftover items.

Ordering new supplies

While this might seem obvious, ordering new office supplies could get forgotten in the hubbub of organizing actual people for the first time in a while. We're sure last year's lunch leftovers have been tossed, but there might be some other things that have expired. For example, if you have office snacks and powdered coffee creamer, you might want to check the expiration dates.

Next, review the stock of all of your most essential supplies. Consider how quickly important supplies might get used once everyone returns. Toilet paper, paper, and pens are all things that might have moved slowly with a small percentage of your workforce at this office. But with things in full swing, you wouldn't want to run out suddenly. Later in this guide, we explore ways to make your office greener than ever.

Welcoming everyone back

What can you do to make people feel welcome? How can you ease their anxiety over the transition? While some people will be excited to get back to work, others might be reluctant or sad.

Keep your company culture in mind, and find ways to be welcoming that align with that culture. One company might offer mini fruit salad bowls and TikTok-worthy drip coffee, while another might offer pizza lunch and silly gag gifts.

> "We're focused on fun just as much as on training. Apart from the cleaning preparation, I've assembled goodie bags with fun treats, bubbles, whistles, lip chap, and such for the day we return. We'll also do a theme day each Friday for a few weeks to bring things back to a team feel. And Puppy Thursday will resume, where employees are invited to bring their socialized dogs to work"
>
> **Maria Ferronato,**
> Office Manager at The Gentleman Pros

Laws and policies for mask wearing and social distancing

Research what the laws will look like when you first welcome everyone back to the office, and how they might change over the first six months following the return. This way, you'll be prepared with company guidelines and policies.

For example, you might find that government mask mandates will end a few weeks after your company returns to work. You might want to have a policy in place that states that employees are able to continue wearing masks if they wish.

And while mask mandates are legally in effect, you might enforce them in hallways and common areas, but allow employees to take them off in their offices or cubicles, provided there's enough space on all sides. But please don't take our word as gospel and check out the restrictions for your office location. Typically you can find these in the UK on the gov.uk website.

"We're working to limit physical interaction with clients. This is possible by executing orders via the Internet or telephone, contactless delivery or controlled entry of persons (while avoiding crowds outside the premises) and physical distancing inside and outside the business premises."

Mike Sheety,
founder of That Shirt

"For the employees that don't have their own office, we are guaranteeing them at least six feet on all sides, with the option of a partition or cubicle. In addition to our nightly cleaning service, we've added a lunch-hour service that will sanitize high-traffic areas like the break room, reception, and meeting rooms. I'm sure we'll have to adjust as we navigate the 'new company workplace,' but first things first. Employee wellness, and then follows effectiveness."

Alison Pearson,
Head of HR at Hal Waldman and Associates

Sanitizing hot desks and common spaces according to schedule

Many companies are increasing the frequency of their cleaning schedules. If hot desk availability is mapped out daily, then each hot desk will need to be cleaned at the end of every day. For common areas, you might also clean these every day instead of once a week.

Conference room scheduling

Changes in how your company works could put increased pressure on conference rooms and small rooms created for video calls. For example, if hot desks are more popular than they once were, that could cause an increase in background noise, meaning more people are likely to use these rooms than they were when they had cubicles or offices. You could build small meeting rooms, or purchase them ready made. If you're also facilitating hybrid work, then use the same software to book rooms as to book hot desks, to keep things simple.

Common room capacity

For most offices, common room capacity won't be an issue. With high vaccination rates, you won't need to limit launch room or breakroom capacity. But, if you have a regional office in an area with concerningly high cases of COVID-19, you might want to implement room capacity policies.

> "Our technology game at our new headquarters opening later this summer will be state of the art, including sound masking and app-based door entry to phone and conference rooms. We'll also be installing a Bevi machine for sparkling and flat flavor-infused water. Each machine will have QR Code smartphone ordering, enabling a limited touch experience."
>
> **Jamie Ridley,**
> Senior Office & Event Manager at Prodege

Communicating with (already) in-office employees

Some employees returned to the office over a year ago. Employees who work with hardware or must serve clients face-to-face have already been in the office. It's important to communicate with them about their colleagues joining the return to work.

You might send a company-wide email or intranet updates about policies and plans, but it's wise to recognize those who have been back for a while separately as well. Send an email to the people who have been at work thanking them for being in the office during periods of uncertainty, letting them know what will change, and encouraging them to let you know right away if they have questions or concerns. Make it clear that you appreciate them for being here all this time and that you want their feedback.

Communicating with returning employees

In your communication, whether that's an email, internal wiki post, or both, list out every update. Include your company policy for hybrid work (if allowed), sanitation procedures, lunchroom policies, and any new software you've implemented to manage hot desks or supply ordering. Even if you've already sent out a survey to discover the needs of returning employees, it's still smart to reiterate that you're open to feedback, and tell them where to leave their suggestions. You could create a Typeform or Google Form to collect additional comments throughout the process of returning to work.

Whatever channel you use to communicate, make sure to format everything clearly and simply. Use bold headlines and bullet points. Make sure to collaborate with a team member and get their outside eye. Aim to address confusion before the message is sent.

Signage for policies and procedures

Creating office-place signs is a great way to communicate and lower the likelihood of you answering the same question multiple times.

"We plan on slowly coming back to the office starting in July. We have separated the office space more than usual and are using cubes for some of the associates to ensure there is spacing and an extra border separating them. We also have posted in the office area a new procedure for cleaning your desk, chair and accessories each evening before you leave. Lastly, in the past, we had cleaners out once every two weeks. We have now scheduled a deep clean every Friday evening. We believe these new procedures and additions should help to keep a healthy and clean environment for all our associates to work safely back in the office."

Jeff Moriarty, Marketing Manager at My Supplement Store

Here are some things you can make signs about:

- The new sanitation and cleaning procedures
- Where hand sanitizer is located
- Mask requirements
- What app to use to book a hot desk
- Where to leave comments and concerns about returning to the office
- To try and keep a certain distance when possible

"We're taking several steps to ensure that the transition back is not only safe but also financially sustainable. We're transitioning from the use of stand-alone applications to an integrated Business Management System. Now that our team is hybrid, it is important to have streamlined communication and collaboration."

Ben Lamarche, General Manager at Lock Search Group

Prepare for new ways of collaborating

If you'll have hybrid remote work, you might need to revisit how your company collaborates. Many remote work tools are great for work at the office too, but you might want to check your tech stack. Will remote and office employees be able to collaborate? Will everyone be able to access their work no matter where they are? Look into how your tools and your people connect to each other. If you need to migrate to new systems, do it ASAP.

Keeping performance reviews and promotions fair

People who choose to work in the office more often shouldn't be unfairly promoted over those who work more days at home. Remember, there are plenty of valid reasons to work from home, including social anxiety, ADHD, wanting to avoid expensive commutes, or needing to be there when a child walks home from school.

As part of your back-to-the-office planning, make sure to talk with executives and managers on your team about how you will ensure that promotions reflect performance, not who "looks like" they're getting more things done simply because they're more visible.

Getting people to and from the office

A clean and regularly santized office environment is essential. But so is sanitary transportation.

The preference of taxis and ride hailing services over public transportation

The increase in smartphone usage and the rising costs of vehicle ownership have seen the growth of taxis and ride hailing services. Many urbanites are now choosing these options over public transportation as they return to work, in an effort to reduce their exposure to viral germs.

With an enterprise-ready solution like Gett, employees can hail taxis directly from their phones while office managers can track journeys and spend. Furthermore, the cost of all the rides consolidated into one monthly invoice. It can be used for all business travel and not just for commuting.

How to offset carbon emissions of all rides

Because fewer employees want to take public transportation for the time being, it's more important than ever to offset your carbon emissions. Use a ground transportation app that offsets carbon emissions for you by investing in projects that are compliant with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. You can also encourage employees to choose electric vehicles whenever possible.

Ride greener with Gett

All Gett UK rides are carbon neutral – we offset every gram of CO2 emitted via our partnership with EcoAct

Choose Gett Green to add 20p to your ride to fund green projects via our partnership with Trees for Cities

Investing in a greener office

One positive outcome of the pandemic was that many people fell in love with simple living, and realized they could make do with less. Aim to get back to business in a more sustainable way than ever before.

Here are some important ways to do this:

1. Provide secure bike storage for employees to increase their likelihood of using bikes and scooters.

2. Downsize your office if possible (to reduce energy consumption).

3. Encourage employees to work at office hot spots and common areas during heat waves or cold spells (offices tend to be more energy efficient than homes).

4. Offset ground transportation emissions and encourage use of electric taxis.

5. Improve the energy efficiency of your office's heating and cooling if possible.

6. Provide cloth napkins, handkerchiefs, and towels and set up multiple laundry baskets as opposed to trash bins (and hire a laundry service).

7. Purchase more energy efficient light bulbs.

8. Provide zero-waste or low-waste office snacks and team lunches.

9. Purchase re-usable lunch containers for employees, to reduce waste generated by returning to the office.

10. Encourage employees to dress informally unless they have a client meeting or industry event to reduce fashion waste (make every day casual).

A lot is changing. Use this opportunity to make some important changes that address the climate change crisis.

Procedure for positive COVID-19 cases

What happens if someone at your company contracts COVID-19? Even vaccinated individuals can contract COVID-19. Although their symptoms would most likely be minor, they could pass the disease to people who weren't able to get vaccinated. That's why a case should be treated seriously.

Talk with your company's leadership team to come up with a policy that reflects your government's guidelines and your company's values for health and safety. All employees should stay home if they experience COVID-like symptoms, and they should get a test as soon as possible. If the test is positive, they should notify their immediate manager and the office manager. You could shut down the office for three days to make sure no one else presents with symptoms. Alternatively, you could ask the employee who has tested positive who they were in close contact with and notify those people to stay home

Updating team-building practices and company events

Some companies might be eager to return to their same team-building activities and company events. Others might choose to reduce group activities in order to lower the likelihood of viral spread. Your choice might depend on vaccination uptake, city rates, and employee comfort level. With your survey or focus group, get a sense for what employees are comfortable with.

If you do plan to host an event, make sure to consider the handling of food and other items. Maybe hot potato and music chairs aren't such good ideas any more. Small compostable dishes with individual servings of dips might be a better idea than a big bowl of dip that everyone scoops out of.

Getting the right travel tools in place

People coming back to the office is only part of the story. People will also be leaving town. Since 33% of business travelers say they lost deals during the pandemic, it's no wonder that travel is increasing. Business travelers are booking trips, and airlines and hotels are preparing for the boom.

Business travel can be a massive expense. It's typically up there with spending on salaries and technology. Business travel is also complex. A few hundred travelers can quickly produce receipts from a few thousand vendors.

To simplify travel, you'll need:

- ✅ A ground transportation solution that consolidates spending on taxis and cars in one place and offsets carbon emissions

- ✅ A business travel management platform that consolidates spending on hotels, flights, and trains in one place and offsets carbon emissions

- ✅ An expense management platform that offers receipt scanning for quick expense reports as well as faster approval and reimbursement processes
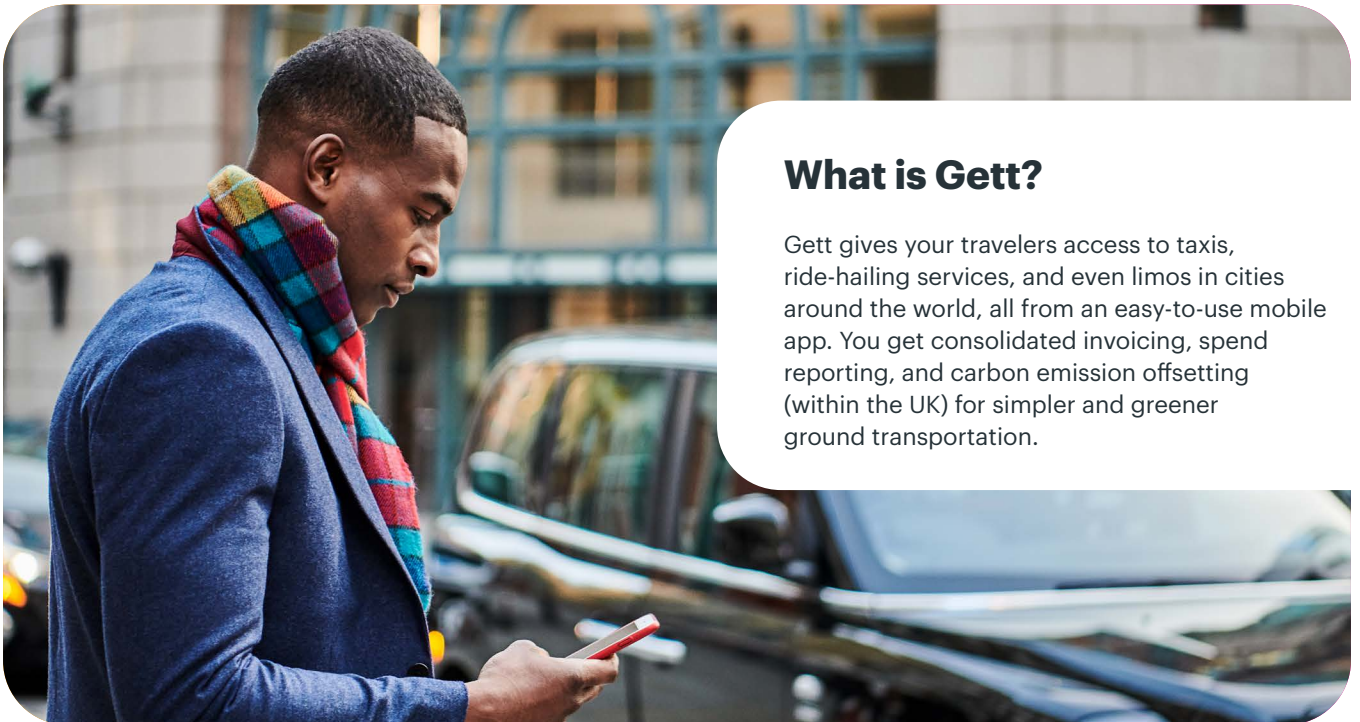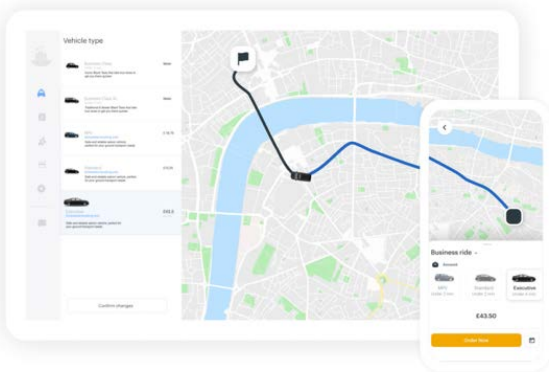
What is Gett?

Gett gives your travelers access to taxis, ride-hailing services, and even limos in cities around the world, all from an easy-to-use mobile app. You get consolidated invoicing, spend reporting, and carbon emission offsetting (within the UK) for simpler and greener ground transportation.

The ultimate checklist for getting back to the office

Culture

- ☐ Survey your workforce
- ☐ Make it clear where employees should submit feedback throughout the process
- ☐ Create policies with empathy
- ☐ Use your company vision to guide decision-making
- ☐ Implement a plan for performance reviews and promotions that don't favor in-office employees
- ☐ Revisit team-building activities and company events

Preparation

- ☐ Replace perished office supplies
- ☐ Purchase new office supplies taking increased usage into account
- ☐ If hot desking, implement a booking system
- ☐ Implement a booking system for conference rooms
- ☐ Create a policy for capacity of common rooms if needed
- ☐ Communicate with employees who have been in the office the past year
- ☐ Communicate with employees who are returning to the office
- ☐ Rollout hybrid-ready team collaboration software if needed
- ☐ Create a positive COVID-19 case procedure

Travel

- ☐ Implement a solution for taxi booking and ride sharing that consolidates spend
- ☐ Implement a solution for flight and hotel booking that consolidates spend
- ☐ Offset carbon emissions from all travel

Green office

- ☐ Encourage office use during heat waves and cold snaps, and prepare for increased use of common spaces
- ☐ Create a secure bike and scooter storage
- ☐ Purchase zero-waste, re-usable lunch packaging for employees as a welcome back gift
- ☐ Increase energy efficiency of appliances, heating and cooling, and lighting
- ☐ Choose paper products and laundry services over wasteful paper products where possible

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