Creation of Remote Call Center During COVID-19 - Success moving from centralized to remote calling

ICF

Presenters:

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2021 Federal Computer Assisted Survey Information
Collection Workshops (Virtual conference)

Agenda

- **Prior to launching remote call center**
  - Early discussions
  - Discussions outlining specifics for execution

- **Federal State of Emergency Declaration**
  - Federal and multiple state government orders

- **Execution of WFH plan**
  - Mobilizing laptops/equipment
  - Brief Timeline
  - Maintaining Quality Assurance
  - Training Remotely
  - Longevity of Maintaining Remote Interviewers

# → **Prior to launching remote call center**

ICF engaged in early conversation around possibility of launching remote call center

# Early discussions and support from senior management

- **Precautions were implemented on-site prior to working from home (WFH) to mitigate the spread of Covid-19**

- **Rearranged seating and adjusted shifts to accommodate social distancing (prior to guidance to wear masks)**
  - Additional cleaning was implemented
  - Cleaning supplies provided directly to interviewers daily

- **Early discussions/planning**
  - Discussed what would happen if we were not able to go into our offices
  - Met with key players to discuss a preliminary plan
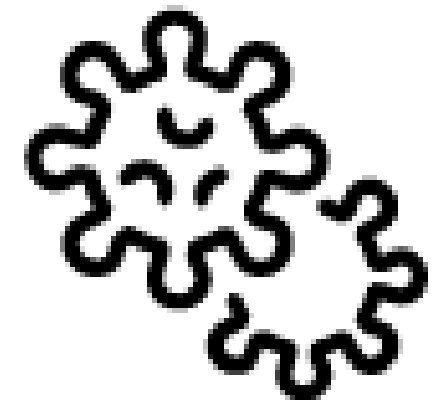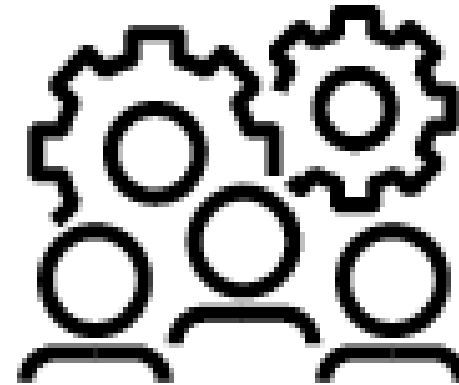
Early discussions and support from senior management (cont'd)

- **Reviewed how we maintained a small tenured workforce previously**
  - Determine applicable lessons learned
  - Data and privacy security concerns
  - Quality and production reservations
    - Concern over supervision/physically monitoring the agents
    - Increased monitoring due to lack of physical presence
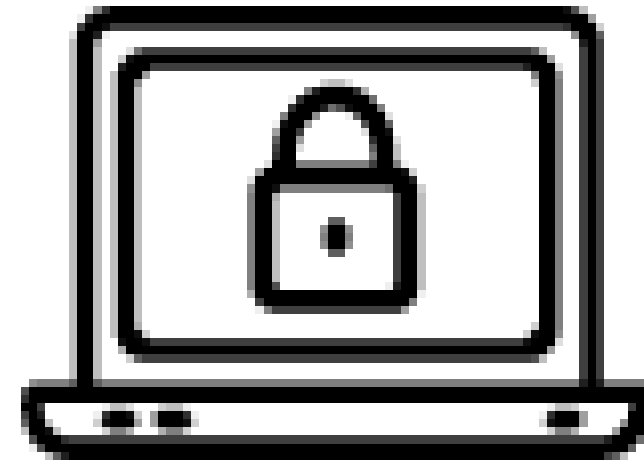
Further discussions outlining specifics for execution and next steps

- **Internal alignment/external approvals**
  - Consulted Contracts Department
  - Met with Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance
  - Client approvals for each of our projects were needed in order to be contract compliant

- **Vetted individuals and their home surroundings to establish a suitable environment**
  - Conducted staff assessment
    - Willing/able to work from home
    - Quiet/private workplace
    - Adequate internet speed to allow connection stability

Federal State of Emergency Declaration

Federal and multiple state government orders

- **Emergency Declaration - 3/13/20**

- **"Stay Home" orders**
  - Local school closures began mid-March
  - Business closures
  - Multiple state shutdown orders in late March

- **Laptops became scarce**
  - Decision to distribute the on-site desktop computers for remote use
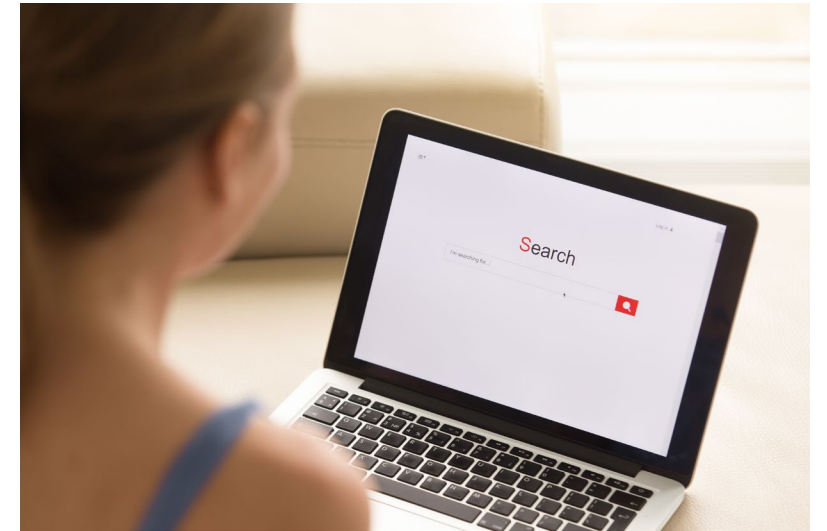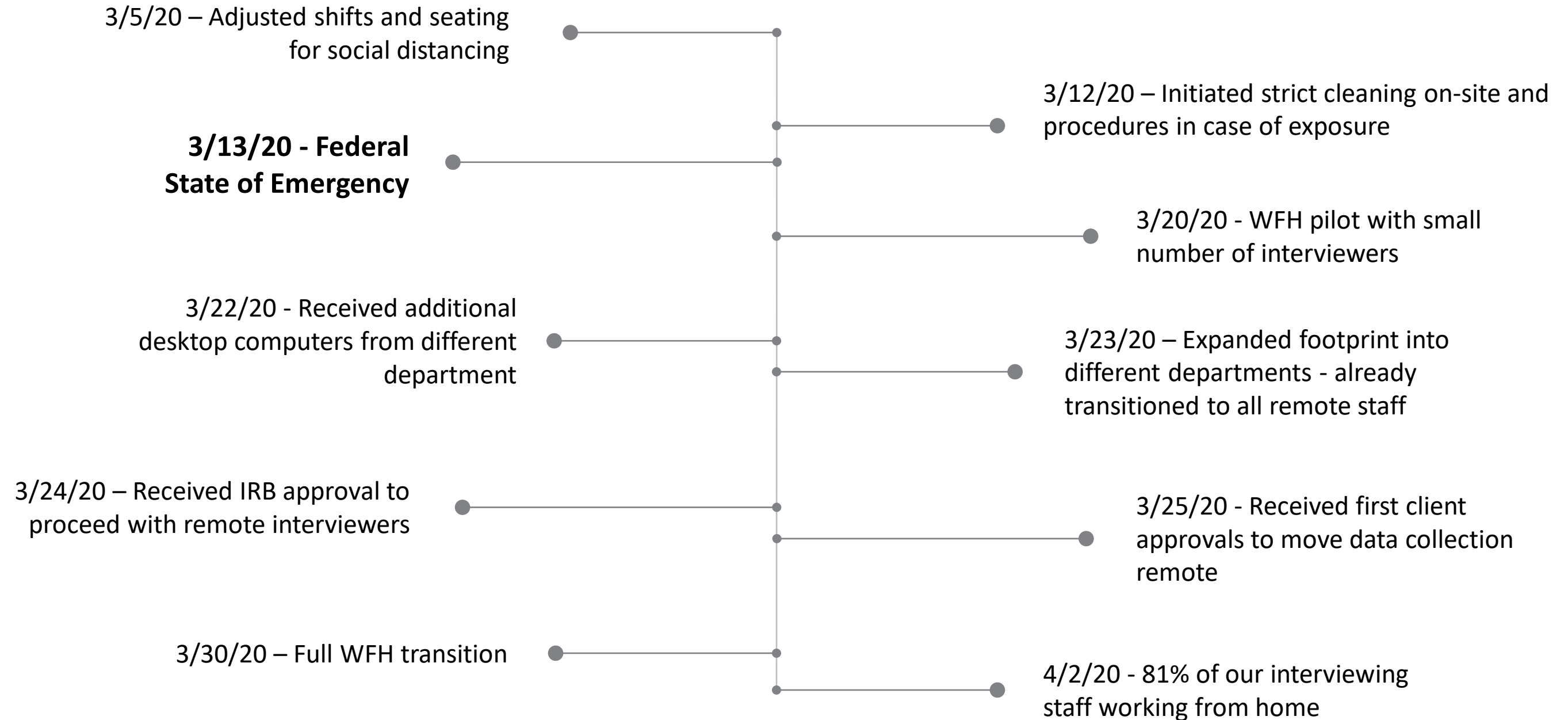 - Secured a small batch of laptops

→ Execution of WFH plan

Mobilizing laptops/equipment

- **Weighed security concerns and options**

- **Extensive testing began mid-March**
  - Access and connectivity
    - Distributed desktop computers
      - Technically capable staff with various internet speeds
      - Call clarity and internet speed testing
    - Troubleshot with IT department
    - Received laptops for additional testing with interviewing staff

- **Internet options**
  - Staff without home internet
    - MiFi and Hotspot options

- **Communication**
  - Evaluated various apps as main form of communication
    - Skype, Teams, etc.

Timeline

3/5/20 – Adjusted shifts and seating for social distancing

3/12/20 – Initiated strict cleaning on-site and procedures in case of exposure

3/13/20 - Federal State of Emergency

3/20/20 - WFH pilot with small number of interviewers

3/22/20 - Received additional desktop computers from different department

3/23/20 – Expanded footprint into different departments - already transitioned to all remote staff

3/24/20 – Received IRB approval to proceed with remote interviewers

3/25/20 - Received first client approvals to move data collection remote

3/30/20 – Full WFH transition

4/2/20 - 81% of our interviewing staff working from home

Quality Assurance

- **Coaching remotely**
  - Team meetings discussing challenges
  - Made use of e-signature as confirmation of coaching
  - Created ability for agents to view their monitoring forms at any time

- **Maintain quality standards in the new environment**
  - Increase monitoring efforts
  - Listen to both recordings and live calls
    - Distractions/background noises
    - Connection/sound quality issues

Training Remotely
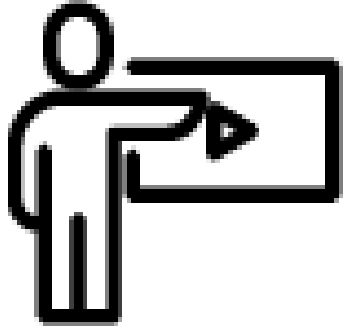
- **Recruiting & onboarding considerations**
  - Maintaining sufficient staffing level
  - Completing new hire paperwork

- **Remote Training**
  - What equipment would they use/do we provide it prior to training?
  - What software to use; compatibility with multiple operating systems/devices?
  - Create an engaging and effective learning environment for remote new hire staff
   - Focus on retention

- **Handling crisis calls/escalations remotely**

Maintaining Remote Interviewers

- Under what circumstances does working remotely make sense in the future?

- Will it shift once more people are vaccinated?

- What if an interviewer prefers to work in an office? or from home? As long as they are effective will we be able to continue some hybrid model?

- Lack of jobs in the area, people appreciate working from home and maintaining steady income - will it shift and when?

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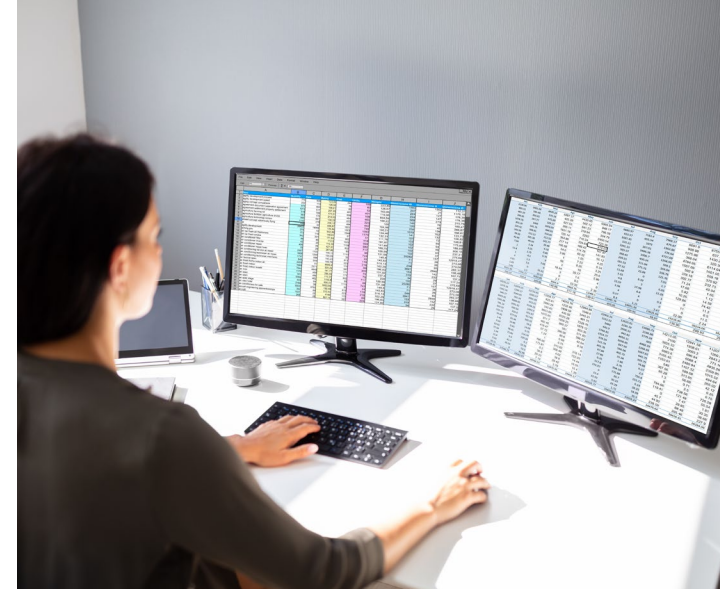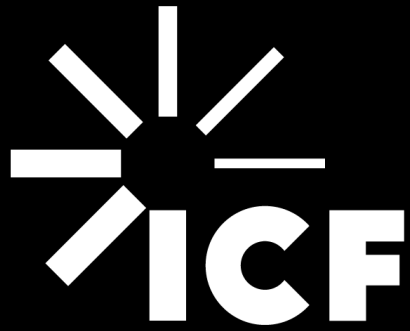
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