

# Branch

# The No-Nonsense Guide To Reopening Your Office

(Without Breaking The Bank)

May 2020



The content in this Guide represents Branch's current knowledge and best practices regarding the recommended operation and furnishing of office properties, where and when permitted by law, during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The health of our clients and partners is our number one priority, and we hope to assist by sharing this information. Consult your counsel, national health guidelines and appropriate local and state regulations prior to following this guide or re-opening your office.

# Summary

## Our New Normal

If you only have one minute to spare, here's the need-to-know information in this guide:

- **Will My Office Change?** There's no avoiding it: the way we experience offices will change for the foreseeable future, for teams of all sizes.
- **Principles of Change.** Experts agree on the basics of how you'll need to adapt your office for the new normal:
  - Where possible, office furniture should be reconfigured to create six feet between employees
  - Physical barriers, like privacy panels or partitions, should be installed between workstations; and
  - In the near term, alternating attendance schedules should be implemented for your team.
- **WFH Is Here To Stay.** Some form of WFH culture will endure even when offices re-open. Organizations will need to equip remote employees to thrive.
- **How Much Will It Cost?** Retrofitting your workplace sounds expensive, and some solutions *are* expensive. But preparing your office for a safe return doesn't have to break the bank.

## In This Guide

Branch is here to help. In this guide, you'll find the following resources:

- **FAQ:** We've summarized research and best practices to answer the most frequently asked client questions around reopening your office space.
- **Reopening Checklist:** Don't have time to distill the research and just want to know what you have to do? Our checklist consolidates the essential to-dos.
- **Our Direction:** Branch is changing, too. We'll share more about how we're evolving to meet the new world of work, and how we can help you do the same.

# Contents

1

**Introduction**

3

**Reopening  
Checklist**

5

**How Branch  
Can Help**

2

**Frequently Asked  
Questions**

4

**Budgeting for  
Re-Entry**

\* Fun fact: this is an example of a *offset* layout with a partition—an easy way to create more distance between desks.

# Introduction

## Your Office Will Change

When the time comes to welcome your team back to the office, things will be different. Whether you're a team of five or five hundred, every organization will need to revisit basic assumptions about personal space, safety and collaboration.

But where do you start? You may have read one of the many “Back to Work” guides released over the past few weeks. At a high level, these guides come to the same three conclusions about the office:

- Reconfigure your office to create six feet between employees
- Install physical barriers between workstations; and
- Adapt scheduling to have employees come to work on alternating days.

This is sound advice—backed by research, CDC guidance and industry best practices—but many of our clients have questions about how to translate this feedback into tangible action without breaking the bank.

Do you have to purchase brand new cubicles or put up walls to create private offices? How can you safeguard the health and productivity of your team on a budget?

## Simple, Clear Advice

In response, Branch has created this simple handbook to help teams of all sizes think through the practical steps they can take to reopen safely—and to understand how much they're going to cost.

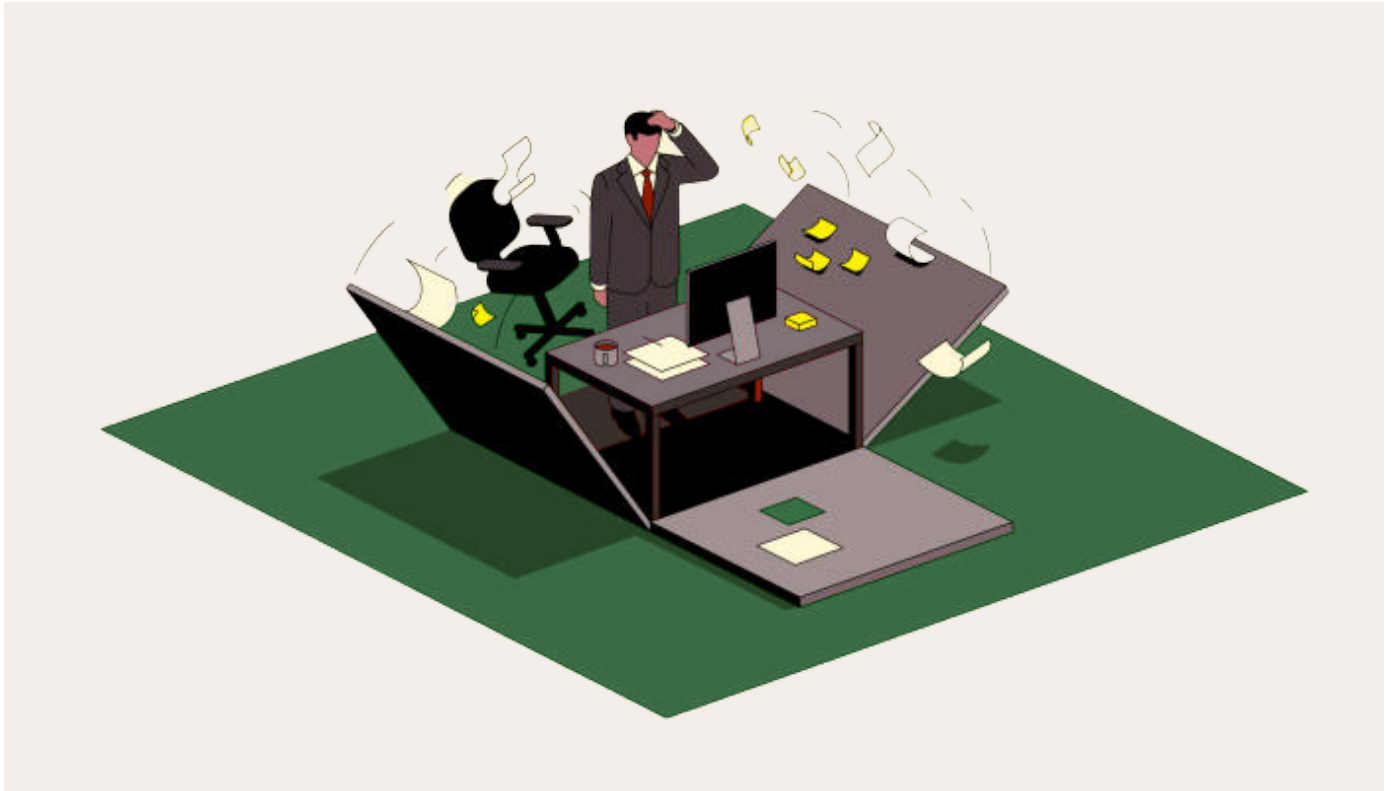
In the guide that follows, we'll share answers to frequently asked questions and a re-opening checklist that every organization should use prior to bringing their teams back into the office. We'll also provide a budgeting guide that introduces office redesign options for every budget.

Lastly, we'll share more of our thinking about how the office could change long-term, and what Branch is doing to help our clients create a better workplace experience in this new environment and beyond.

The process of re-opening will look different for everyone. Some will transition back to the workplace sooner or later than others; some will do it all at once while others do it gradually; and some will have the resources to adjust their offices completely while others must make do with what they have.

Our goal with this guide is to enable you, no matter your circumstances or strategy, to better understand what all this means for your organization and employees.

# FAQ



## Questions & Solutions

Thought leadership on getting back to work is filled with big (and great) ideas, but can be short on workable guidelines. We're here to simplify those ideas into practical next steps. Below are some questions we've heard from our clients over the past few weeks, answered with our best insights to approaching and solving them in an effective way.

### **Do we really need to make changes to the office?**

Yes. Some changes to the office are table

stakes for the return to work. We'll explain what those are below. Not doing anything risks creating an unsafe work environment, alienating your employees and creates liability. But there are simple and effective solutions at your disposal!

### **Do we need to replace all of our furniture?**

No. But you'll probably need to change your layout. Privacy panels and modular partitions will be essential in most offices. Where possible, desks will be spread out and staggered to accommodate social distancing.



Before scrapping your current furniture, have a space planner redesign your current layout. \*

\* We'll do this for free at Branch, no obligation.

### **How do we create safe, personal spaces in an open office?**

Returning employees will need sanctuary spaces, especially in open-office layouts. The quickest and most affordable way to do this is by installing privacy panels and modular partitions between each employee's desk, adding separation to help keep workers settle in with ease.

You can also implement an alternate work schedule (see below). Ultimately, by reducing the density of workers, each individual worker will have more space to themselves. These small changes go a long way in creating personal space within an otherwise open office.

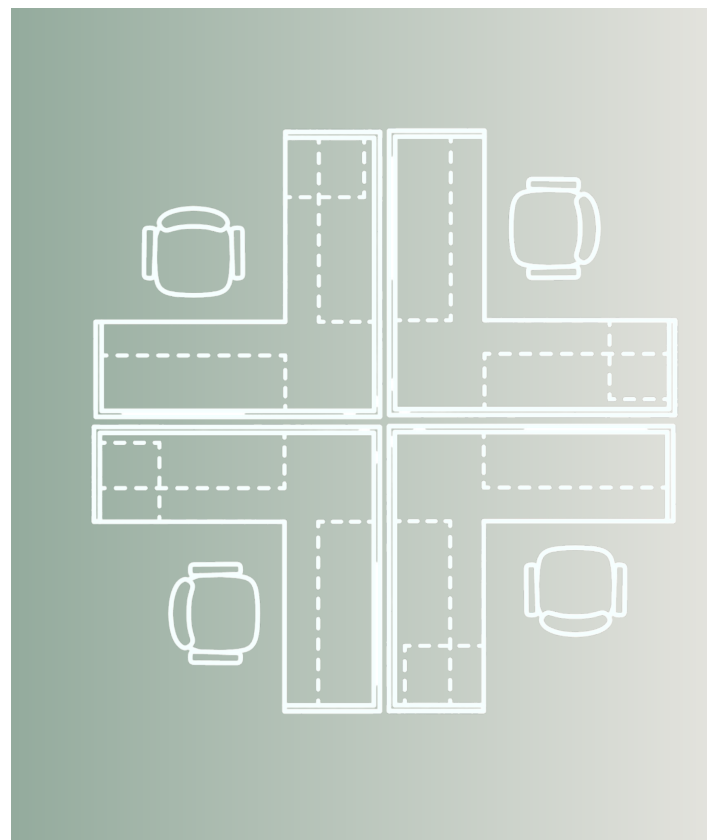
### **Should we implement an alternate work schedule?**

With an alternate work schedule, staff come in on alternating days to keep density low. They're a compelling way to gradually ease your workforce back into office life, but mean months of work from home conditions that may be less than adequate. Our advice: if you're going to implement an alternate work schedule, consider subsidizing ergonomic furniture for employees at home. After a couple months of hunching over the kitchen table, their backs—and productivity levels—will thank you.

### **How do I maintain company culture if half my team is working remote?**

Chances are, you've already implemented a lot of new, important measures in your organization for staying connected while everyone works from home. These might include: more frequent all-hands meetings and check-ins across teams, more recurrent 1:1's between employees and their managers, weekly written reports on each teams' progress, substituting phone calls with video meetings, etc.

We suggest maintaining these strategies throughout the transition back to work, starting from when your first employees start going back into the office, to keep your culture strong.

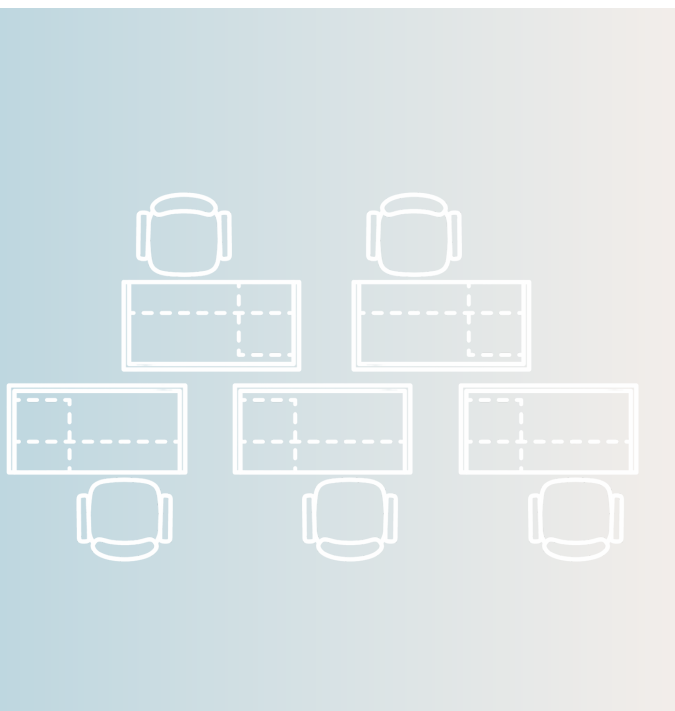


L-Shaped Layout

## What about conference rooms? Can they still be used?

Meeting rooms are the most densely packed part of the office. But COVID-19 will not be the end of in-person meetings. Instead, going forward, meetings will be smaller and likely more brief. We suggest most companies reduce the number of seats in their meeting rooms by 50-75%, ensuring that there are six feet between each chair around the table. Additionally, meeting room surfaces should be disinfected between use, and air purified where possible.

Furthermore, we recommend refraining from common "conferencing customs," at least for the first few months of getting back to work, such as shaking hands when meeting or saying goodbye, or sharing pens and keyboards with one another. As a general rule of thumb: Use only what's yours.



Offset Layout

## Is co-working still safe?

The short answer: probably, so long as you're renting from a high quality workspace operator. Co-working business models are built upon cultivating a high density of workers in a certain space. Well-prepared operators will reduce desk density, add physical barriers, increase cleaning frequency, supplement air purification systems, limit activity in shared common spaces (kitchens, lounge areas) and perhaps even introduce daily temperature checks.

Be sure to check with your own operator that they are meeting these requirements before your team re-enters shared space.

## What other steps can I take to help our team feel safe?

Communicate constantly, supply protective equipment like gloves and masks, and ensure the office is disinfected on a daily basis. Be supportive and understanding of everyone's circumstances. Some workers may take re-entering more seriously than others; some may be psychologically impacted from the extended (and perhaps continued) periods of remote work. Encourage your team to talk about their reactions and feelings to the circumstances at hand. And remember: Show your staff that you take their health seriously.

If you have more questions, or want a free consultation on preparing your office for the return to work, email us at [hello@branchfurniture.com](mailto:hello@branchfurniture.com).

# Checklist

We've created this **Return to Work Checklist** to help you cover the basics before welcoming your team back to the office.

## Before Re-Opening

- Re-plan your office layout to accommodate social distancing (contact Branch for a free, no obligation space plan).
- Implement physical barriers between workstations per your budget (privacy panels, full height partitions or construction)
- Add visual cues to remind employees to keep social distance (ie. tape/stickers to clearly identify each employee's 6' workstation area).
- Set limits on how many people can occupy common areas, like kitchens and restrooms, at any one time. Reduce meeting room capacity by 50%.
- Ask your landlord what steps they're taking to prepare your building for re-opening, including sanitizing common areas and elevator access plans.
- Ahead of re-entry, conduct a full-office deep-clean
- Clearly communicate back-to-work strategy to your team.

## After Re-Opening

- Equip your office with masks and gloves, and supply each employee with a personal inventory of disinfecting wipes.
- Review the cleaning guidelines supplied by the manufacturer of your office furniture and implement a daily surface cleaning schedule.
- Supply office employees with disposal receptacles for PPE and used disinfectant wipes.
- Schedule a biweekly check-in with your executive team to review the situation and consider additional measures (alternate work days, etc).



# Budgeting

## Create A Safer Office On Any Budget

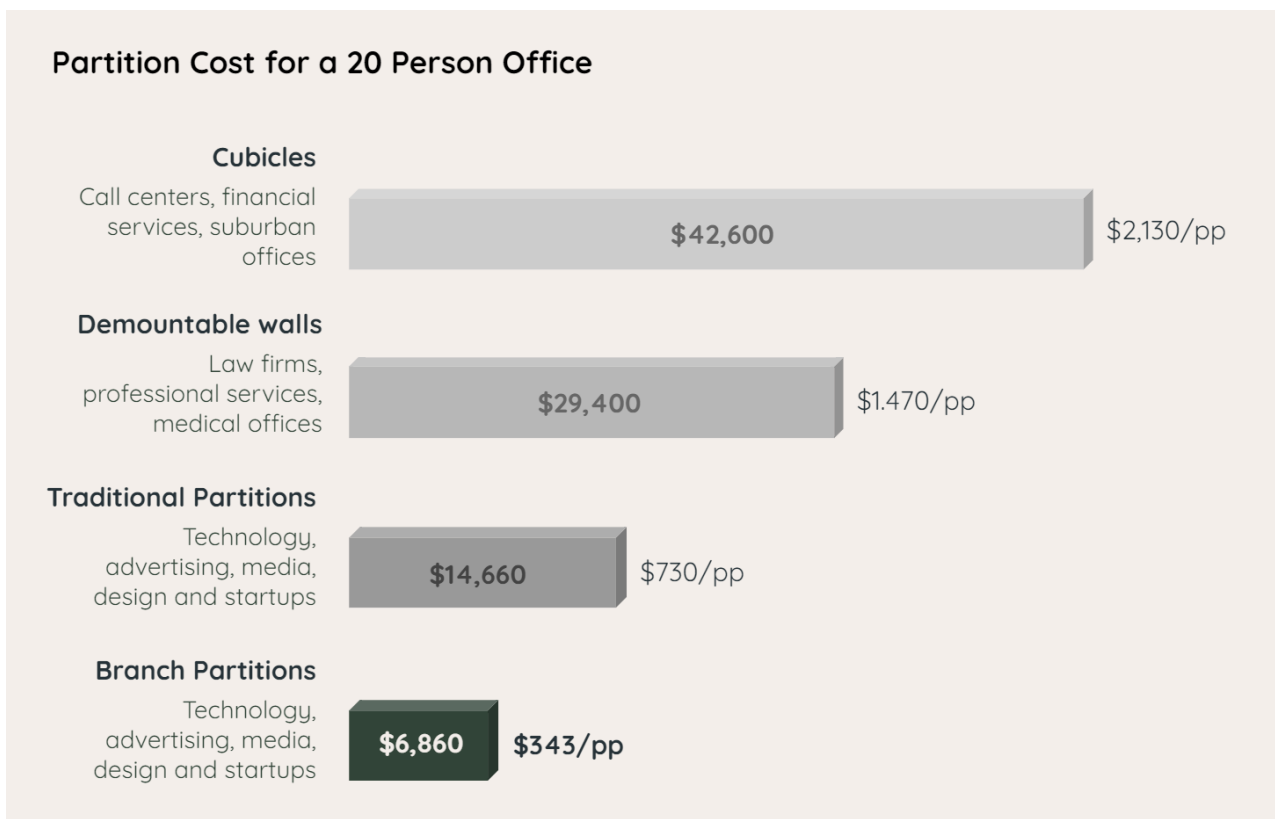
Depending on what measures you take, the cost to prepare your space for re-opening can vary widely.

Some companies will simply increase cleaning frequency, spread their desks out, and create personal retreats with dividers between employees. These simple changes could cost as little as a few hundred dollars per employee.

At the other end of the spectrum, well-resourced companies will take on

additional office space to reduce density, subsidize “work from home” setups for their remote employees, build private offices, replace furniture and more.

We believe teams shouldn't feel limited by budget in creating a safe, healthy workspace. That's why we created this simple budgeting guide. Below, you'll find an outline of the rough costs that it will take for the most pressing part of the retrofit process: **creating a physical barrier between your team members.**



# Our Direction

## Principles Of Evolution

Like everyone else, the Branch Team across the United States and Canada has been working from home since early March. While we've found new ways of communicating and collaborating, we've also spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of world we'll be returning to when things get back to "normal."

In the past, we've worked with clients to design optimal privacy solutions, design open space floor plans that still allow for ample personal space, situate employees at home with ergonomic home office setups, and much more.

In order to help companies adapt even further to the new work environment, we've moved quickly to design new products and services, while doubling down on the things we've always done best. Here are the five principles guiding our evolution:

### New products for a new reality

We're launching a new line of modular privacy panels and standing-height partitions, designed for universal compatibility with any office furniture. So whether your company is a dedicated Branch customer or new to our company, you'll be able to take advantage of our upcoming product developments.

We're starting out by offering them in traditional and antimicrobial finishes, and in timeless and versatile colorways so that they can seamlessly fit into any office space. Contact us now to inquire about more details, or to place pre-orders, beginning in early May.

### Supporting home offices

In March, to better serve customers working from home, we began packaging and shipping chairs, desks, storage products and deluxe home packages to consumers across North America.

We've worked hard to ensure our products can be shipped and delivered to individual homes with industry-leading speed (~5 business days). We offer no-contact white glove assembly in most markets, along with easy self-assembly for seating and storage products.

Many of you may be considering staggering your team's return to the office, and we've started working with some of the biggest companies in the world to outfit employee home office setups at a substantial discount. We'd love to do the same for yours. If your team continues to work from home, we're dedicated to providing no-hassle and affordable ergonomic furniture to help them work their best.

## 3 **Enhanced white glove service**

Branch's end-to-end installation service is a big part of the reason we're able to claim one of the industry's highest NPS scores, and we've strengthened our procedures to create a safer, healthier white glove experience

We've collaborated with our manufacturing and logistics partners to ensure that all our furniture goes through a three-stage disinfection process. In addition, product deliveries that require pre-assembly and installation are now conducted by socially-distanced crews, always outfitted with proper PPE.

## 4 **Healthy space planning**

Our space planning team is up to date on recommendations from health authorities and workplace design experts alike. We commit to only producing space plans that safeguard the health of your team.

We're continuing our staple offer of free space plans to any organization or team that is considering adding adjustments to their current office, or needs assistance in planning a new one. If you personally would prefer to just chat about amendments to your office layout over phone or video conference, we'd be happy to set that up as well. Our team is standing by to help you.

## 5 **Affordability in a time of crisis**

We started Branch because we were shocked at how expensive and complicated buying high quality office furniture was. Now that budgets are tightening, we're doubling down on our promise to make

furnishing your office both easy and affordable, without sacrificing quality.

Our new privacy panel and partition products will cost half of the price of comparable quality products, including shipping. We're absorbing any increased delivery costs resulting from our enhanced installation procedures. And we've started offering some of our essentials, like ergonomic desk chairs, with even more affordable self-assembly pricing (up to 25% off).

## **We get it because we've been there**

We understand how difficult and complex this entire process has been and will continue to be because we've been going through it ourselves.

There's a good chance that your business took a hit from the pandemic. Ours did as well. So you can trust us when it comes to helping you outfit your office with better products at affordable prices because it's the philosophy we were founded on.

No matter what your budget or team circumstances, Branch has solutions that can help.

# Citations

## Further Reading

We relied on the following sources and many others to write this guide, along with primary interviews with our network of space planners and designers.

For more details on our recommendations, we encourage you to visit and read:

### **Centers for Disease Control: Guidance for Businesses and Employers**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>

### **Eden: Workplace Re-Entry Guide**

<https://go.eden.io/covid-19-services-resources/>

### **McKinsey & Company: Europe Needs To Prepare Now To Get Back To Work**

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/europe-needs-to-prepare-now-to-get-back-to-work-safely>

### **Bain: Back To Work**

<https://www.bain.com/insights/covid-19-back-to-work-advance-retreat-adapt-repeat/>

### **WorkDesign: A Common Sense Guide For Returning To the Post COVID Workplace**

<https://www.workdesign.com/2020/04/a-common-sense-guide-for-the-return-to-the-office/>

### **Inverse: Will The Cubicle Make A Comeback?**

<https://www.inverse.com/culture/will-the-much-maligned-cubicle-ever-make-a-comeback>

### **WorkDesign: Rethinking Workplace Design In The Wake Of COVID-19**

<https://www.workdesign.com/2020/04/return-to-the-workplace-design-in-the-wake-of-covid-19/>

### **OSHA: Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19**

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

### **JDSupra: Return To Work Best Practices**

<https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/return-to-work-best-practices-during-26629/>

### **Architects Newspaper: Speculative Coronavirus Design Concepts**

<https://archpaper.com/2020/04/speculative-coronavirus-design-concepts/>

### **Gensler: 10 Considerations for Transitioning Back To Work**

<https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/10-considerations-for-transitioning-back-to-work-in-a-post>

# Branch Is Ready To Help.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

There's finally a light at the end of the tunnel, and we're starting to see what the workplace might look like when we begin to repopulate offices. Now is the time to prepare for that new reality.

Employees will be returning with heightened health and safety standards, and it is incumbent on organizations to create a workplace environment that they will feel comfortable in.

Branch is here to help however we can. Whether it be providing a free space plan, helping with procurement of physical barriers like credenzas and partitions, or simply answering questions, we're just an email away.

## Get In Touch

We're here to help with any of the following needs:

- Free workplace reopening consultation
- Free guide to layout options
- Free space plan to optimize distancing in your office
- Desk divider, privacy panel and partition options
- Remote office furniture packages and discounts

**John McNamara**  
**Head of Sales**  
[john@branchfurniture.com](mailto:john@branchfurniture.com)