Case Study—Silicon Valley City Reopening Readiness

Situation

A mid-size Silicon Valley city of 80,000 is planning to transition its 700 person staff and facilities back to in-person activities starting in summer 2021. The challenges include:

- The city has eighteen buildings of varying uses, ages and sizes. Buildings include City Hall, administrative and maintenance facilities, a library, community center, and recreational facilities.
- Each building type is subject to a different set of state and local guidelines specific to its usage. Keeping up with, interpreting and implementing the guidance is daunting.
- Rapidly evolving government guidance has left the city confused and unsure whether they should follow the latest guidance or act more conservatively.
- Any COVID-19 exposures and infection incidents in city facilities will erode staff and visitor trust, and may lead to financial liabilities for the city.
- While the public has expressed a desire to return to city facilities, some city staff are reluctant to do so, citing health concerns.
- Staff and visitors will be returning to an environment very different from the one before COVID-19. People are not prepared to work and operate in this environment with new rules and protocols.

Approach

We assessed the city's readiness to reopen in three key areas:

- How ready are city facilities to reopen?
- How ready are staff and visitors to return, and is the city ready for them to return?
- Is the city ready to maintain and support staff and visitor safety needs after reopening?

We employed our Safe Space model to help answer these questions. This model takes a holistic approach and analyzes four critical areas of consideration:

- Building spaces, ventilation and Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)
- Engineering and administrative measures that prevent and protect against exposure and transmission
- Protocols, practices and resilient capabilities in responding to and recovering from exposure incidents
- Preparedness, engagement and trust-building practices and capabilities to ensure staff and visitors feel safe, employ safe protocols, and operate in the new environment
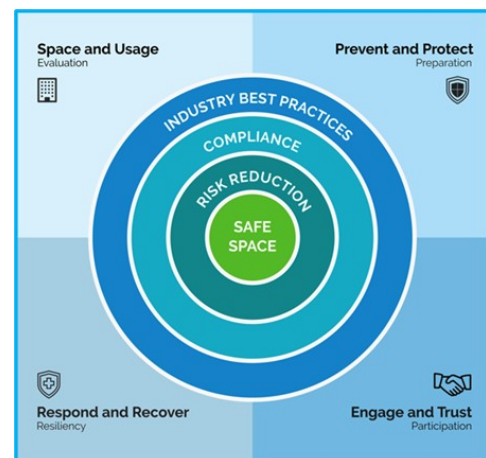
We conducted physical inspections of each building and examined the implementation of engineering controls and compliance with CDC, state and county guidelines, and industry best practices. We reviewed the city's COVID-19 Workspace Safety Plan and spoke with city and department leaders, and selected operational staff to augment our inspection and understand current practices and administrative controls, initiatives, capabilities, and concerns. From there, we analyzed and integrated the findings to identify gaps and a set of prioritized recommendations.

Case Study—City Reopening Readiness Assessment

Key Gaps Observed

- Measures inconsistently applied with many building-to-building variations
- Incorrect interpretation of government guidelines and implementation of some measures
- HVAC systems are operating in COVID mitigation mode but system was optimized for pre-COVID-19 operations
- Some implemented measures are not current with the latest guidance
- Underestimating of staff and visitor anxiety about returning to in-person activities
- Slow response and implementation of actions from easing and tightening of restrictions
- Small COVID-19 response team operating in high touch start-up siloed collaboration mode

Outcomes

The project was completed in May 2021. The city is incorporating the assessment results and recommendations into its reopening plans. Key actions for reopening include:

Address compliance gaps with government guidelines. Recommendations include standardizing implementation of measures across buildings, updating the facility health safety plan, updating measures in alignment with latest guidelines, and reviewing and enhancing ventilation performance in select locations.

Implement a "transition success" program to guide people back to in-person activities. Implementing a change management program, engagement and trust building campaigns, and increasing training levels will address people's concerns, drive adoption of new protocols, and prepare people for the new environment.

Increase operational and infrastructure readiness to support reopening and beyond in a high occupancy environment. Recommendations include creating and staffing a dedicated operations office, updating the HVAC systems and operating plans, raising preparedness levels, and updating staff roles and responsibilities.

Increase response agility and execution speed to limit COVID-19 spread as people return and exposure risks increase. Recommendations include rapid response playbooks, use of sensing technologies and automation tools, and a COVID-19 operations office to enable early detection, rapid response, and "one city" execution.

Reopen with success. Contact us now!

Strategy of Things® Reopening Readiness Services helps businesses and cities safely reopen and return to in-person activities. We apply building science, advanced innovations, and a holistic strategy to create COVID-19 Safe Spaces to safely return to. Since 2017, Strategy of Things® has been helping cities, communities and businesses become smarter, safer, more responsive and resilient. We are a Silicon Valley based innovation firm bringing science, breakthrough strategies and disruptive innovations to help government, communities and businesses solve complex problems in new ways.

STRATEGY OF THINGS

26250 Industrial Blvd. Suite 102
Hayward, CA 94545 USA

www.strategyofthings.io

marketing@strategyofthings.io

+1-510-736-4699

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