

Solidarity and Staff Safety Guidelines for COVID-19

These guidelines outline organizational expectations and practices for how we respond to requests for face-to face-advocacy and communications during the COVID-19 crisis. They were drafted with staff safety, and client and community safety at the forefront, and to provide support and guidance for staff members fielding requests for public or face-to-face meetings with clients, potential clients, or community groups. **Staff can and should decline an assignment when they feel unsafe or unable to safely be present.**

One of our long-term goals is to ensure that all people in WA can exercise collective power to build and support healthy, economically stable communities. As part of this work, we are often asked to stand with clients who face exposure to dangerous conditions. We understand the need to support clients and communities while at the same time prioritizing staff safety during this pandemic.

CLS will regularly review these guidelines, and will make appropriate updates when circumstances change, and as relevant information and advice about COVID-19 emerges. These guidelines will remain in effect until CLS rescinds or amends them in writing, and we expect all staff members to read and comply with them.

COVID-19 Information

At this time, connecting with clients and community members face-to-face puts staff, clients, and communities at risk. From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the relevant literature, we know that COVID-19 is thought to be transmitted by respiratory droplets from infected persons, especially when they cough or sneeze. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or be inhaled into the lungs. People can transmit the virus even if they are not showing any symptoms. CDC also states that people may get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. There is also new data about airborne transmission. (See guidance from NELP).

Essential Workers

Some workers are considered “essential” and not subject to the stay-at-home order. Governor Inslee’s essential worker definitions include the following:

- Professional services, such as legal or accounting and tax preparation services, when necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities and critical sector services.
- Workers who provide or determine eligibility for food, shelter, in-home supportive services, child welfare, adult protective services and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals (including family members and individuals experiencing homelessness)
- Unions and worker advocacy organizations

There will be times when CLS staff fall into one of these categories.

Criteria for engaging in face-to-face meetings

Until further notice, face-to-face advocacy meetings must be approved by the direct supervisor and the Director of Advocacy (or a direct supervisor, if non-advocacy related). We require all staff to avoid

face-to-face contact unless unavoidable to their work, and it may only be considered or undertaken if all the requirements below are met.

1. **Legally mandated/Necessary** – the staff member has examined the situation and determined that there is **no other way** to achieve the client’s goal or protect the client’s interest.
2. **Essential Worker** – an in-person meeting is necessary and key to supporting the health and safety of a client who is identified as an “essential” worker and there are no other means to achieve the same outcome.
3. **Basic Need** – the legal work focuses on a necessity related to the health or safety of the client.
4. **No other means** – there are no other means of meeting with the client other than in person – phone, video, or app is not available.
5. **Approved** – the face-to-face meeting is approved by both the direct supervisor and the Director of Advocacy.

Required Safety Protocols

After the staff member has explored, with others (the client, direct supervisor, or the community member/group) whether there are any other alternatives to a face-to-face meeting, and has determined that there are not, they must:

- (a) review the information related to the risk provided by the CDC, and sign and return a form to CLS stating that they have done so and understand the risk as it is currently understood by the CDC/scientific community at large.
- (b) agrees to follow all safety protocols for the meeting including,
 - (ii) wearing a mask that covers the nose and mouth (this mask protects others from exposure, but does not protect the wearer from exposure in most cases);
 - (iii) washing hands frequently and applying hand sanitizer;
 - (iv) avoiding indoor meetings when possible;
 - (v) keeping a six-foot separation between yourself and the client/people you are meeting with;
 - (vi) avoiding mass gatherings and crowded places, where possible;
 - (vii) not sharing any equipment such as pens, paper, phones, computers, cars/transportation etc.; and
 - (viii) to the extent possible under the circumstances, staff agrees to ask that all people with whom the person is meeting also wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth and to maintain appropriate social distancing if they are not.
- (c) Staff members are encouraged to discuss and explain this policy, to the extent appropriate under the circumstances, with clients and others with whom the staff member will be meeting.

Additional Considerations

We cannot imagine every situation that our staff members will confront. However, we are committed to working with individuals to devise a solution and approach that meets the needs of our staff and our clients and communities.

We acknowledge the pressure our staff are under when they are requested to attend meetings, visit prisons and jails, and stand in solidarity or observe during strikes and rallies. We wish to provide staff with appropriate guidelines and protections under these circumstances. Ultimately, we will stand by staff decisions to attend or not attend these events. We do require that everyone who makes the decision to attend such events follows the guidelines outlined above.

Decline of Assignment Procedures

Staff can and should decline a request when they feel unable to safely be present, and we strongly prefer that all meetings be held virtually at this time. If a situation arises where a staff member does not feel comfortable declining internally, such as to a supervisor, they can contact Trisa Kern or Travis Andrews for assistance.

If a staff member is in a position where they feel uncomfortable declining a request from a community member due to safety concerns for themselves, family members, clients or other third parties, they may decline directly to the person making the request, citing these guidelines as CLS safety requirements.

If the assignment request is internal and is declined, the direct supervisor will work with the Advocacy Director to discreetly determine if there is an appropriate replacement to assist with the meeting request (considering factors such as location, skillset, language needs, etc.) without revealing that someone declined. If no staff member can be identified or would like to accept the meeting request, CLS may decline the meeting request or attempt to provide alternate technological accommodations to the client/community.

If the essential functions of an employee's position are unable to be performed (i.e., Advocacy and Community Engagement Specialists cannot attend community meetings and events) they should work with their supervisor for an alternate arrangement or assignment as needed.