



...a better way

TELECOMMUTER HANDBOOK

Work schedules, ergonomics, workplace culture, and administrative issues of telecommuting are included in this handbook. 5 Pages 20-308

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Telecommuter Handbook

[Company]

[date]

Introduction to Telecommuting

[Company] allows telecommuting to create the opportunity for improved staff efficiency without compromising productivity, quality or cost-effective client/customer service. Telecommuting (also known as “teleworking”) is the use of telecommunication to work outside the traditional office or workplace, for example at home or other space conducive to professional work.

The goal of all Department employees – telecommuters and non-telecommuters – is to serve the public and help our clients thrive by providing high-quality services. By supporting employees’ ability to work from remote locations, the Department positions itself to:

- Be more resilient and productive in times of emergencies and inclement weather events;
- Improve our ability to recruit and retain high-performing employees;
- Reduce and/or optimize office space and associated costs; and
- Improve air quality by reducing vehicle-miles traveled.

Background

[Company] developed telecommuting guidelines in 1999. It is the decision of each department whether to allow employees to telecommute. Telecommuting policies are developed and managed individually by departments. Several departments have written policies, which were consulted in the development of these guidelines. Within [Company] and the [name] Department, there have been employees telecommuting since the 1990s.

The Role of the Telecommuter

The ability for any employee to telecommute is entirely at the discretion of his or her supervisor and not all employees/positions are eligible for a telecommuting agreement. In order to telecommute, the employee must:

- Understand and follow the department’s telecommuting policy, and remember that telecommuting is a privilege that is not available to all staff and can be rescinded at any time;
- Be approved through a formal written request to his or her supervisor;
- Not have had any performance or attendance issues in the previous six months or be on a performance improvement plan;
- Have demonstrated the ability to work productively with minimal direct supervision;
- Maintain frequent and/or scheduled communication with colleagues and supervisor (remember that although telecommuters are working off-site, they are still part of a team);
- Maintain the quality, quantity and timeliness of ongoing professional responsibilities;
- Have a home/family situation that is conducive to telecommuting (in the case of one’s residence being the primary work location); and
- Establish a daily schedule, work area and professional routine that are consistent with office hours and free from interferences or distractions.

Note that if telecommuting is not working well for you for any reason, you should talk with your supervisor as soon as possible.

The Role of the Supervisor

The role of a manager is to set expectations for performance, deliverables and outcomes; establish regular reviews of workload, assignments and progress; proactively identify any barriers to productivity and performance; facilitate good communication across a work team; and optimize performance through effective leadership.

Fostering Teamwork

As the telecommuting program begins, you will have the opportunity to discuss it with your supervisor and your work team. Your supervisor will explain the rules for telecommuting and emphasize that not all requests for telecommuting will be approved. Requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and approval is dependent on job requirements, needs of the work team and department, and the employee's performance history and attendance record.

The same basic work expectations will be in place for any and all staff performing equivalent job functions, regardless of their work location. You may experience changes in how your work team communicates and how it functions on collaborative efforts, though your unit will still be expected to perform as a cohesive team with telecommuters and non-telecommuters recognized as equally important to the success of the team.

Workplace Culture

Supervisors are expected to ensure an appropriate level of professional engagement in office-based activities and retain high morale among their employees. You may notice particular effort on the part of your supervisor to:

- Notify all staff of new opportunities in the Department, both routine and special assignments. Missed opportunities through lack of communication, or perceived inequities between telecommuters and non-telecommuters when it comes to promotions or access to new projects, can undermine the telecommuting program.
- Ensure the sharing of information among staff members so that all employees are aware of each other's projects and activities. Opportunities for efficiency, benefitting from the lessons learned by others, and building on synergies across related projects will be lost if updates are not routinely provided.
- Celebrate success and provide public recognition of achievements as he or she acknowledges and highlights the accomplishments of both telecommuters and non-telecommuters as they relate to overall team performance.

Work Schedule and Administrative Issues

Remember that telecommuting, in and of itself, does not affect an employee's days or hours worked. In fact, telecommuters should be working their normal schedule and be available to clients and other staff during their normal scheduled hours. Any change to your daily work schedule must be approved by your supervisor in advance.

Note that teleworkers may or may not continue to have permanent workspace dedicated for their sole use maintained within [Company] office buildings.

Payroll procedures are unaffected by telecommuting. All staff can enter their timesheets and access their payroll and benefits information from off-site locations by going to the [Company] Home Page (www.company.com), scrolling to the bottom of the page, and clicking on *My Summit*.

The number of days per week or month an employee may telecommute is a decision made by the supervisor through discussion with the telecommuter. When telecommuting is planned for times that in-office meetings are regularly scheduled, you may be asked to call into the meeting by phone in order to participate. Similarly, you will be required to come in to the office if special meetings or training sessions fall on your usual telecommuting days and your physical presence is required by your supervisor.

Supervisors will maintain a schedule of which employees are telecommuting on which days and will communicate this schedule to the team to help facilitate information sharing across all team members.

Telecommuters will be expected to develop a system for organizing the work they will do at home and assuring they have the necessary equipment, files, and other documents they will need for telecommuting days. Any costs associated with providing this assurance is the responsibility of the telecommuter.

Ergonomics

To prevent repetitive stress injury and carpal tunnel syndrome, it is important to keep some ergonomic standards in mind as you set up off-site work locations. Working in a comfortable environment makes your work more pleasant, helps you stay focused, and keeps the productivity levels and quality of your work higher. It also results in less physical strain.

Ergonomic considerations include:

- The location of the keyboard should allow for employee's upper and lower arms to be bent at about 90 degrees. A wrist rest may provide additional comfort.
- A document that is placed next to the screen as close to eye level as possible should minimize frequent movements, thereby reducing neck and eye strain.
- The top of the monitor should be no higher than eye level. The screen should be approximately 18 inches from your eyes. If the screen can be tilted, it should be positioned about 10-20 degrees backward for easier viewing.
- Your body should be positioned comfortably so that the top front end of the seat pan does not cause pressure on the lower part of the legs, which could restrict blood flow to the legs. A foot rest, if used, should be inclined at approximately a 14 degree angle toward you to help alleviate shoulder and leg pain.
- The pedestal portion of the chair should have five legs to prevent tipping.
- Frequent stretch breaks are recommended for anyone who performs computer functions for several hours at a time to reduce fatigue and muscle strain.

Monitoring and Measuring Performance

Evaluation of the telecommuter's job performance should be consistent with Department procedures, should focus on measurement of progress toward established objectives, and

should not differ from performance evaluation of on-site employees. Individuals approved for telecommuting should remain on the same career path as if they worked full-time on-site and should not be held to a different standard than their peers.

There is a required evaluation of a telecommuter's performance and the overall success of the telecommunicating agreement within six months of beginning to telecommute. (See the "6-Month Telecommuting Review" form included in the *Application for Telecommuting* packet.) Furthermore, a review of the Department's use of telecommuting should be included in each employee's annual performance review.

Application Process

The *Application for Telecommuting* packet provides guidelines and forms for the employee to complete when making a request to telecommute. The employee is expected to read the *Telecommuting Policy and Guidelines* and the *Telecommuter Handbook*, submit the completed application form to his or her supervisor, and, if approved to telecommute, work jointly with his or her supervisor to complete the "Telecommuting Equipment and Work Schedule" form. All forms and documents can be found on the public health intranet site.

Termination of the Telecommuting Agreement

Throughout the terms of the telecommuting agreement, your supervisor retains the right to make changes to the arrangement, including termination of the agreement. Some circumstances that may lead to termination include:

- Unit, section or department need;
- Decline in productivity or quality of work;
- Changes in job duties or work team functions;
- Uncontrollable distractions in the home and no alternative telecommute work space is available; and
- Feelings of isolation on the part of the telecommuter.

If it is determined that you cannot continue telecommuting for any reason, the "Termination Documentation" form (included in the *Application for Telecommuting* packet) should be completed with input from both you and your supervisor, and you can expect to be asked to return to the office environment as soon as possible.