
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Issue Brief: Teleworking in State Survey Agencies

Introduction

Teleworking, broadly defined to encompass work practices based outside of the traditional office setting and facilitated by telecommunications (1), is increasingly common in the United States as a method to attract and retain talented employees, enhance productivity, and reduce overhead costs, while also helping employees better balance work responsibilities and family needs (2). Teleworking also may provide environmental benefits gained by reduced traffic, better air quality, and energy conservation (3). In 2004, 24.1 million employees teleworked at least one day per month, representing nearly 20% of the adult American workforce (4). Interest in teleworking among public sector employers also is on the rise, as demonstrated by Federal government initiatives promoting telework in Federal agencies, Federal funding for the Department of Labor "to encourage greater use of scheduling flexibility and telework options in the private sector" (5) and city and state agencies offering telework options to their employees.

Due to the travel required by surveyors, particularly in rural states, state survey agencies are experimenting with flexible work approaches that may help recruit and retain staff. Teleworking appears to be particularly well-suited to the typical tasks and responsibilities of surveyors given the high volume of time spent away from the office for facility visits, the capacity to complete and transmit required documentation from a home office, and the facility visit and documentation requirements that serve as inherent mechanisms to help structure day-to-day activities and monitor performance. The frequent face-to-face interaction required during surveys and occasional office meetings help minimize potential feelings of social isolation, a common concern about teleworking.

Summary of State Examples

This report describes the telework programs¹ in place at the state survey agencies in Indiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The information presented is based on interviews with agency staff and review of documentation supporting the telework programs.

The key features of the five telework programs, their impact, and lessons learned from the agencies' telework experience are summarized in this section. Detailed information for each state's program is presented in state-specific descriptions.

Key Features

The telework programs of the five featured state survey agencies differ in scope, design, and functioning. The sizes of the telework programs vary from three teleworking surveyors in Wyoming to 105 in Wisconsin. Program duration ranges from over 15 years in Indiana to less than one year in Wisconsin. The Indiana agency requires telework arrangements for all long-term care and Intermediate Care Facility for the Mentally Retarded (ICF/MR) surveyors, while the Mississippi agency offers the telework option to all long-term care surveyors. Participation in the Wisconsin agency's telework program is required for surveyors from all program types hired after March 2005 and optional for surveyors on staff prior to that time. The North Dakota and Wyoming agencies limit the proportion of teleworkers to maintain a balance of office-based and home-based surveyors, all of whom are trained in multiple program types. The agencies differ in the

¹ Although not necessarily used by state survey agencies to describe their programs, the term *telework* encompasses home- and community-based workplace practices and is used in this issue brief for purposes of consistency.

equipment they supply to teleworking staff, although most provide laptop computers and pay for home Internet service installation and monthly fees. Most of the agencies use or plan to use ASPEN Survey Explorer, and teleworkers in North Dakota and Wisconsin also have home access to the Automated Survey Processing Environment (ASPEN) Central Office (ACO).²

Impact

Teleworking is perceived to have positively affected many aspects of agency operations. Four agencies (all except Indiana) conducted pilot programs or trial periods to work through logistical, technical, and policy issues prior to implementing permanent telework programs. The Wisconsin agency's pilot program included an evaluation of the impact of teleworking on various aspects of job performance and satisfaction. The Mississippi, North Dakota, and Wisconsin agencies have analyzed impacts of teleworking on travel costs. Other evidence supporting the impact of the telework programs is largely anecdotal, drawn from observations of supervisors and management staff as well as intermittent verbal feedback from teleworking and office-based staff.

Based on cost analyses conducted in three states (Mississippi, North Dakota, and Wisconsin) and less formal examination in the others, the agencies have not identified significant travel cost savings as a result of their telework programs. Only the North Dakota and Wisconsin agencies have had or anticipate cost savings due to reduced office space. Teleworking has been particularly useful for reducing office commute time for the four agencies with only one office location in the state (Indiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Wyoming).

² CMS expects the states to manage and maintain the security policies and procedures of those employees working from remote locations. It is a state responsibility to verify and validate users through a state sponsored "challenge response" authentication process, thereby allowing users access to both state and federal data systems.

The agencies commonly credit teleworking as a factor in effectively expanding recruitment efforts beyond competitive metropolitan areas, resulting in larger candidate pools and increased access to professionals in rural areas. Teleworking also has increased agencies' flexibility to retain valued staff who are required to relocate due to family commitments. Staff at the Mississippi, North Dakota, and Wyoming agencies perceive that productivity, teamwork, and communication have remained effective under the telework systems, perhaps partly attributable to focused agency efforts to promote communication and ensure equitable workload across staff. Job satisfaction and morale appear to have been enhanced for teleworkers at these agencies. Wisconsin's pilot program evaluation reflected similar perceptions, finding that staff productivity, teamwork, communication, job satisfaction, and morale were maintained or improved by telework, although workload increased for some office staff as a result of obtaining information from on-site files on behalf of teleworking staff. Findings on increased job satisfaction and morale for teleworkers is anticipated by agency management to translate into higher retention rates.

Morale issues for office-based staff due to concern about teleworker productivity have arisen in one of the agencies (North Dakota) that employs staff through both office-based and telework arrangements; however, agency management indicate that teleworking surveyors accomplish more surveys on average than the office-based staff. The North Dakota and Wyoming agencies note that reduced travel time to conduct facility complaint visits and revisits has been an additional benefit of having teleworking staff located in various regions of the state.

Lessons Learned

Agency experience underscores the importance of strong organizational IT capabilities for implementing and maintaining an effective and efficient telework program. The North Dakota agency extols the perceived benefits to teleworker productivity and job satisfaction of secure home access to ACO. The introduction of

teleworker ACO access also appeared to increase job satisfaction for North Dakota's office-based surveyors as it reduced their time committed to assist teleworking colleagues with report revisions and also their concern about teleworkers' productivity. Agencies recommend establishing communication mechanisms to encourage feedback on problems encountered and suggestions for improving the telework system, particularly during initial implementation. Promoting routine opportunities for face-to-face interaction with peers and supervisors is strongly recommended; various policies on required office time for teleworking surveyors are utilized by the five featured agencies.

Noted characteristics of effective teleworkers include self-motivation, self-discipline, strong organizational skills, and independence. In view of the central role of e-mail communications and specialized computer software programs for teleworking surveyors, computer capabilities also should be considered when interviewing potential new surveyors. The agencies advocate developing clear documentation on telework

policies and procedures and requiring teleworkers to sign a program agreement that explicitly states the agency's right to revoke telework status. Safety checklists guiding teleworkers in self-assessment of the home-based office environment also are suggested by several agencies. Training specific to teleworking is useful for surveyors and supervisors, highlighting the changes effected on traditional work processes.

Conclusion

Overall, the agencies appear to have successfully integrated their telework programs into daily operations, and all plan to continue their programs. Cost savings noted to date have been limited to reduced office space expenditures for some agencies. However, the perceived benefits of teleworking for surveyor retention, recruitment, and perhaps even productivity, are anticipated to lead to long-term savings. In the shorter term, teleworking has been found to increase flexibility and job satisfaction for surveyors seeking greater balance between work responsibilities and family demands.

References

- 1 – Di Martino, Vittorio. The High Road to Teleworking. International Labor Organization, 2001.
- 2 - International Telework Association and Council, 2001
- 3 - www.ivc.ca/governments/usa/federalprogram.htm, 2005
- 4 - <http://www.ivc.ca/studies.us.html>, 2005
- 5 - <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/08/20040805-6.html>

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PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Telework Programs

Indiana

Summary

The Division of Long-Term Care at the Indiana State Department of Health provides survey and certification services to Indiana's 585 long-term care facilities and 550 Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded (ICF/MR) with one central office by utilizing a home-based office approach for its 100 long-term care surveyors, and 16 ICF/MR surveyors.

Introduction

This report briefly describes the structure and functioning of Indiana's home-based work program for long-term care surveyor staff, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

The Division of Long-Term Care implemented teleworking for all long-term care surveyors over 15 years ago, at the inception of the current federal long-term care survey program. The decision to institute telework as a condition of surveyor employment was based on projected logistical and cost-saving benefits of surveyors traveling directly from their home base to facilities located throughout the state, rather than requiring travel to and from the single agency office in Indianapolis. The expected costs associated with providing equipment and support to teleworking staff were favorable compared to the costs of establishing multiple regional offices.

Intervention

All long-term care surveyors employed by the Indiana agency work from a home-based office. Surveyors must have a working telephone and valid driver's license. During the four- to six-month training period prior to taking the Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Test, new surveyors divide their time between training

activities at the central office and on-the-job training at facilities with "seasoned" surveyors.

The agency provides surveyors with laptop computers, printers, and fax machines, and reimburses for mileage from home to facilities and to the central office in Indianapolis. The state is divided into six long-term care regions, with a supervisor overseeing activity in each region. Each year, surveyors are required to travel to the central office in Indianapolis for three three-day training meetings and also participate in four regional training meetings. Although supervisors are supplied with cell phones and dedicated phone lines, the majority of surveyors utilize their own home telephone lines, accessing the state system with a toll-free number. Communication among surveyors and supervisors, when not at a facility, is accomplished via e-mail, telephone, and pagers. Surveyors are required to access e-mail at least three times per week.

Supervision of surveyors is accomplished primarily through supervisor observation, sometimes unannounced, during facility surveys. Surveyors use an automated system to document activities accomplished during each 37.5 hour workweek and are responsible for notifying supervisors of planned work schedules.

Surveyors use ASPEN Survey Explorer (ASE) and submit reports to a Quality Review contact at the Indianapolis office through a secure network, with finalized ASE information imported by office staff into ASPEN Central Office. Handwritten documentation is mailed to the

Indianapolis office for permanent storage, with no copies remaining in the surveyor's home. Office-based IT staff provide computer and software training to new surveyors and assist with computer problems on an ongoing basis through an IT Help Desk accessible by phone and e-mail; problems that cannot be resolved require surveyors to transport laptops to the office. To allow for routine maintenance checks and software updates by the six IT staff, all surveyors are required to bring their laptops to the tri-annual central office meetings.

Implementation

The telework program has been in place for over 15 years. New surveyors are hired with the understanding that teleworking is a condition of employment. The new surveyor training and orientation program addresses the operational aspects of teleworking, including computer skills, software needs, and communication methods.

Impact

Because the telework program was instituted in Indiana at the outset of the state contract to conduct federal long-term care surveys, it is not possible to assess the impact of teleworking compared to a previously utilized office-based approach. However, agency management report that communication, teamwork, and productivity do not appear to be negatively affected by the home-based system. The approach has been effective in accomplishing the agency's workload with a single office location.

In addition, the telework aspect of the surveyor position has facilitated statewide recruitment,

opening the search to rural areas where the salary may be relatively attractive rather than restricting the candidate pool to the intensely competitive metropolitan areas. The lessened travel burden and increased flexibility for surveyors are speculated to positively affect retention of staff.

Lessons Learned

Agency staff highlight the importance of strong organizational computer capabilities and the availability of IT support to ensure timely, and when necessary, confidential, information flow between surveyors and the agency's central office. If resources permit, it would be useful to provide all surveyors with a dedicated phone line as well as cell phones for safety and communication purposes.

Because their homes are designated as the base of operations, surveyor travel time is considered paid work time. This requirement results in fewer hours of work not dedicated to travel as well as inequity between teleworking surveyors and IT and other office-based staff for whom the paid workday begins upon arrival at the office. If state requirements allowed, agency management would establish that mileage reimbursement and workday payment begin 30 minutes after home-based surveyors leave their home.

Contact Information

For more information about the teleworking program at the Division of Long-Term Care at the Indiana State Department of Health, please contact Suzanne Hornstein, Director, Division of Long-Term Care at 317/233-7289 or shornste@isdh.state.in.us.

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Telework Programs

Mississippi

Summary

With the goal of strengthening retention and recruitment, the Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification at the Mississippi State Department of Health established an optional telework program in 2003 available to all long-term care surveyors meeting eligibility requirements.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Mississippi's telework program, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Prior to establishing the telework program, surveyors were required to commute daily to the central office in Jackson when not on a facility visit, regardless of commute distance. This requirement was a hardship for surveyors with a lengthy commute, and was reported to be a key factor in the resignation of several surveyors. The telework program was initiated to reduce travel and increase job satisfaction, with the goal of improving staff retention and recruitment.

Intervention

Twenty-two of 25 long-term care surveyors currently participate in the optional telework program. Eligibility requirements include supervisor recommendation and successful completion of the Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Test and other required training. Supervisors may not be home-based. Teleworkers must sign an agreement that documents agency expectations and states that the agency may revoke telework status at any time.

The agency provides teleworkers with laptop computers and cell phones, and reimburses for personal fax and printer cartridges. Surveyors

utilize their own home telephone lines and use a toll-free number to access the agency system.

Teleworking staff are required to attend monthly team meetings at the Jackson office to complete off-site preparation, record review, and scheduling activities. On alternate months, staff spend an additional day at the central office for training or staff meetings. The agency also requires surveyors to complete documentation for immediate jeopardy at the central office to allow for in-person communication among team members and supervisory guidance.

Surveyors work 40-hour flex time weeks. Supervision is conducted via phone and e-mail communication as well as natural monitoring mechanisms such as timely completion of survey reports.

Surveyors receive basic computer training when issued their laptops, including instruction on using the e-mail program, and can access telephone IT support on an ongoing basis. Computer maintenance checks are conducted when surveyors assemble at the central office for monthly meetings. The agency currently is testing use of ASPEN Survey Explorer.

Implementation

The agency conducted a three-month pilot telework program involving four surveyors in Summer 2003, followed by expansion of the program to include all interested and eligible long-term care surveyors.

Impact

Although formal analyses evaluating the impact of telework on staff retention and recruitment have not been conducted, the introduction of the telework program made an immediate difference in retention, influencing the decision of several formerly employed surveyors to return to the agency. Feedback from teleworking surveyors has been extremely positive, indicating that working from a home-based office helps balance the heavy surveyor travel schedule. The telework program has expanded the recruitment pool beyond the Jackson metropolitan area and has been noted as a factor that brought candidates to apply for surveyor positions.

The telework program has eliminated surveyors' often substantial commute to the Jackson central office previously required on non-facility workdays. Cost analyses conducted by the agency found that travel costs have not decreased, due primarily to the addition of reimbursement for travel from home offices to the central office when required as well as to surveyed facilities. The agency has retained the same amount of office space to accommodate the presence of all staff during monthly meetings and training sessions.

Lessons Learned

Agency management staff advise agencies to be prepared for varying levels of computer capability among surveyor staff, which can affect effective use of e-mail and software programs for teleworkers despite the provision of IT training and technical support. Attention to computer skills and capacity for learning during recruitment efforts may be useful. Surveyors should be required to check e-mail frequently, as e-mail communication is critical in the teleworking context.

To facilitate access to more intensive in-person communication, it is useful to match newer surveyors with an experienced surveyor residing in the same geographic area.

Contact Information

For more information about the telework program at the Mississippi Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification, please contact Marilynn Winborne, Acting Director, at 601/576-7326 or marilynn.winborne@msdh.state.ms.us.

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Telework Programs

North Dakota

Summary

Faced with losing qualified applicants from rural areas of the state due to the requirement to move to Bismarck, the Division of Health Facilities at the North Dakota Department of Health implemented a community-based workplace program in 2000. The program has effectively expanded the recruitment pool and currently supports five surveyors across the state.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of North Dakota's community-based workplace program for surveyor staff, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff and review of documentation supporting the program.

Background

The agency established its community-based workplace program as a strategy to strengthen recruitment by gaining access to professionals outside of the Bismarck metropolitan area who are not able or willing to commute or relocate their family, often due to farming or ranching ties in the rural community. The program also was expected to enhance surveyor retention by increasing morale and job satisfaction and permitting the agency to retain valuable staff who must relocate a distance from Bismarck.

Telework programs are encouraged by the North Dakota state government as a means to address concern that rural communities are being drained of professionals by large Bismarck-based employers; teleworking is viewed as a mechanism that "reverses the migration of health care professionals from the rural areas of the state."

Intervention

Five of 27 surveyors currently participate in the community-based workplace program. The

agency limits participation in the program to a maximum of one-third of all surveyors at any one time. Managers, team leaders, and nonsurveyor staff are not eligible to participate. Eligible surveyors must be permanent, full-time employees, live more than 25 miles from the Bismarck central office, and must have passed the Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Training. Surveyors also should be qualified in two or more program types to provide sufficient activity for a 40-hour workweek from a community-based location. Surveyors may apply to participate after one year of employment; the waiting period is designed to ensure time to develop a strong experience base and demonstrate the capacity to effectively work without close supervisory monitoring. Community-based surveyors must sign a program agreement and complete a safety checklist that addresses 19 factors related to a safe and healthy work environment.

The agency provides community-based surveyors with dedicated phone lines, covering costs of installation and monthly service fees. Surveyors use their own computers and printers, but receive technical support for hardware as well as for agency-supplied software. Community-based surveyors are required to be at the Bismarck office two weeks per quarter. One week is dedicated to staff training. The additional week, or four 10-hour days, in the office can be distributed throughout the quarter as elected by individual surveyors. The required additional office days are intended to ensure in-person contact with agency managers and socialization

with office-based staff as well as providing opportunity for surveyors to obtain office supplies, utilize facility files, receive computer and printer maintenance checks, view Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) training videos, or reconvene teams to develop deficiency documentation for a completed survey. Office- and community-based staff are required to work the same core hours during the standard four-day workweek. Supervision of community-based surveyors relies heavily on e-mail communication regarding schedules and activities.

The agency began establishing secure home access to ASPEN Central Office (ACO) and the state network in January 2005. To facilitate community-based work and increase efficient use of time, the agency has developed on-line access to a single file of necessary survey forms, eliminating the need to obtain multiple forms from the Web or the agency network in preparation for each survey.

Implementation

The agency conducted a year-long pilot program to work through logistical and policy issues prior to establishing a permanent program and to examine the cost impact and effect on office-based morale of allowing a portion of staff to work from an alternate location.

Impact

Agency management reports that recruitment efforts have yielded a higher-volume response since the advent of the community-based workplace program, with many applicants indicating that the program drew them to apply for a surveyor position. The increased flexibility and reduced travel time associated with the program also appear to have contributed to retention of experienced and productive staff. The program also is perceived to have expedited facility revisits by having surveyors located throughout the state.

Verbal feedback on the community-based workplace program is obtained during quarterly meetings between individual surveyors and management staff. This structured input as well

as ongoing feedback from both community- and office-based staff helps identify and resolve interpersonal, technical, or other problems associated with the program. Office-based staff have expressed concerns regarding workload inequity and productivity of community-based surveyors, although workload concerns diminished considerably when home access to ACO was established, which reduced reliance on office-based staff to assist with revising deficiency documentation. Contrary to the concerns of office-based staff regarding productivity, agency management estimate that community-based surveyors accomplish 10 to 15 percent more surveys than their office-based colleagues due to the expectation that they conduct revisits in their geographic area or survey independently for their other program types. Agency management commented that, in their experience, community-based staff tend to actively strive to fill every minute of the workday.

The agency has reduced office space and associated expenditures as a result of the community-based workplace program, although other cost savings have not been identified to date. However, agency management anticipates long-term financial benefits related to retaining surveyor staff.

Lessons Learned

Agency management advises setting specific program goals and structuring the program to function effectively within the agency's operations and travel regulations. Documentation of the program's eligibility criteria, policies, and procedures is recommended, as well as requiring a signed agreement that explicitly states the agency's right to revoke community-based work status. A workplace safety checklist also is suggested.

Efficiency and productivity can be maximized by establishing teleworkers in regions of high facility concentration and requiring training in multiple programs, particularly in states with relatively low volume of facilities and surveyor staff.

If a telework program limits participation to a subset of staff, it is critical to address potential resentment and perception of inequity in workload, productivity, or work environment among office-based staff. It is advisable to establish mechanisms that encourage communication on problems and suggested improvements related to the program. Agency management should ensure that community-based staff are accessible during agreed upon hours and request that they limit comments about the benefits and comforts of working from home that might cause resentment among office-based workers who do not have the telework option.

Although time-consuming and challenging, agency management strongly advocates establishing secure home access to the state network and ACO. Rural states may encounter difficulties related to dealing with multiple phone companies across the state and establishing sufficient bandwidth to home-based offices,

although the North Dakota agency has been successful in installing broadband service for all community-based surveyors.

Contact Information and Resources

For more information about the community-based workplace program at the North Dakota Division of Health Facilities, please contact Bruce Pritschet, Director, Division of Health Facilities, at 701/328-2352 or bpritsch@state.nd.us.

North Dakota's Policy & Procedure Manual, Community-Based Workplace Program Agreement, and Safety Checklist used in the agency's community-based workplace program are available as a resource for agencies considering establishing a telework program. These documents can be accessed online by clicking on the Promising Practices Supplemental State Resources link.

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Telework Programs

Wisconsin

Summary

The Bureau of Quality Assurance at the Wisconsin State Department of Health and Family Services implemented a teleworking program for surveyors across all program types in Spring 2005, after conducting and evaluating the results of a 16-week pilot telework program. Teleworking is voluntary for surveyor staff hired prior to March 2005 and is required for all new hires.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Wisconsin's telework program, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff and review of documentation supporting the program.

Background

The agency began to explore teleworking as a means to reduce travel expenditures and overhead for office rent and expenses as well as for its potential as a staff retention and recruitment strategy. After receiving several staff requests to work from home, agency management conducted a preliminary assessment of possible cost savings and decided to proceed with a pilot telework program.

Intervention

One hundred five of 120 surveyors currently participate in the telework program. Teleworkers must sign an agreement that documents the planned work schedule, confirms that the employee will abide by the telework policies and procedures, and states that the agency may revoke telework status at any time. Teleworking staff also must complete a Safety and Ergonomic Checklist and provide annually a certificate of homeowners or renters and liability insurance coverage.

The agency provides teleworkers with laptop computers, printers, cell phones, and phone

cards. Office furniture equivalent to that provided in the office environment, as desired by the employee, also must be provided to meet collective bargaining agreements. Long-term care surveyors are required to attend monthly scheduling meetings at the regional offices and other meetings or trainings as directed by supervisors. Surveyor staff from all program types must bring their laptops to the office monthly for maintenance and software updates.

The agency provides mandatory training on teleworking, presented via interactive Webcast. The training addresses Internet connectivity and other IT issues, supervisory procedures, administrative processes, and recommendations on setting up the home office. Surveyors who participated in the pilot program provided insights on coordinating the workday and handling communications in the home-based office environment.

Efforts are made by supervisors to ensure the equitable distribution of workload across teleworking and office-based staff. Supervisors are responsible for monitoring teleworkers to ensure that program efficiency, productivity, and service are maintained or improved.

The agency pays for monthly Internet fees for teleworkers using broadband connections; dial-up users utilize a toll free number to access the agency network. Surveyors are required to utilize broadband services if available in their area, due to lower speed and ASPEN-related difficulties associated with dial-up service. Most surveyors use ASPEN Survey Explorer and have

secure home access to ASPEN Central Office (ACO). Teleworkers with dial-up connections access ACO through a Citrix server. Digital senders are being installed at all regional offices, allowing instant scanning and transmission of large documents to teleworking staff.

Implementation

The agency began a four-month telework pilot program in May 2004, with participation of 31 surveyors representing the five regional offices. Pilot teleworkers used laptops already issued by the agency and their personal Internet Service Provider.

A workgroup involving representatives from all program types and agency functional areas was assembled to help structure the pilot program, evaluate its effectiveness, and refine the program based on pilot findings. Key workgroup tasks included gathering information and documentation from operational telework programs at three Wisconsin State Agencies and several other states' survey and certification agencies, developing the pilot telework program policies and procedures, and participating in monthly conference calls with pilot teleworkers to discuss barriers, resolve problems, and share best practices.

The pilot program yielded informative experience with IT needs, travel policies, and other operational processes. The pilot's evaluation elicited feedback regarding telework's impact on various aspects of job performance and satisfaction from teleworkers, supervisors, and office-based colleagues. The agency's telework workgroup refined policies, procedures, and operational systems based on pilot findings and began agencywide implementation of the telework program on a staggered schedule, region by region.

Impact

Because agencywide implementation is still in its early stages, data supporting cost savings or staff retention and recruitment improvements are not yet available. However, the pilot program's evaluation found that work productivity and timeliness, team and supervisory communication

and relationships, job satisfaction, and morale were maintained or improved by the transition to teleworking, according to the majority of survey respondents. Additional findings from the telework pilot pointed to the need to speed access to ACO and other programs by requiring broadband rather than dial-up Internet service; provide computers, printers, cell phones, fax machines, and a second phone line to teleworkers; and create online access for completing a variety of routine forms. Agency staff continue to consider strategies to address the pilot finding that telework increased workload for many office staff, due to time spent obtaining information from facility files or reports on behalf of teleworkers. Findings from the pilot program prompted the agency to institute a telework policy that authorizes supervisors to require teams to gather in-person when necessary to most effectively complete documentation on a particular survey's findings.

Significant annual cost savings resulting from office space reduction are anticipated; one office space will be retained for every four teleworking surveyors to accommodate staff meetings and other occasions that require group office space.

Agency management will examine the telework program's impact on travel costs, although substantial savings are not anticipated given the high frequency of surveyor travel regardless of office location. The impact of teleworking on retention and recruitment are the most significant, long-term benefits expected. Increased job satisfaction and enhanced quality of life reported by surveyors participating in the pilot program are expected to translate into higher retention rates. The agency also anticipates attracting more candidates due in part to the telework feature of the position.

Lessons Learned

Agency management recommends teleworking to other state survey agencies, commenting that the "upfront headaches are worth the long-term benefits." Valuable planning activities noted by the agency include examining telework policies and procedures in use by other entities, reviewing relevant collective bargaining agreements, and

considering state travel policies. Agencies are advised to require signed agreements that explicitly state the agency's ability to revoke telework status at any time. To ensure that all required documentation is completed before surveyors begin teleworking, it is useful to assign a single staff member to oversee collection of telework-related documents and forms.

The agency encourages focused supervisor and surveyor training addressing the impact of teleworking on traditional work processes, including changes in peer and supervisor communication, document review procedures, planning, and organizing. Particularly during program start-up, it is critical to establish effective communication mechanisms and encourage feedback on ways to improve the telework system and processes.

Anticipating and resolving IT issues as early as possible will ease the transition to teleworking. In addition to planning for Internet service installation, computer maintenance, and software support, specific recommendations include explicitly stating the levels of Internet service that will be reimbursed, requiring regularly scheduled transport of laptops to the central or regional office for maintenance, and developing step-by-step instructions to assist teleworkers in connecting their computers and installing computer software updates from the network. The use of digital senders in regional offices has substantially increased the efficiency of hard copy document transmission from the office to teleworker homes.

Additional practical considerations include physical office downsizing plans, furniture distribution, and consolidation of office telephone lines for use by multiple staff when at the office.

Looking to the future, the agency now addresses teleworking in applicant interview questions to assist with selection of individuals who will thrive in the telework environment.

Contact Information and Resources

For more information about the telework program at the Wisconsin Bureau of Quality Assurance, please contact Janet Eakins at 608/266-2055 or eakinjl@dhfs.state.wi.us.

Wisconsin's Policy & Procedures Manual, Telework Application, Telework Agreement, Telework Safety and Ergonomic Checklist, Telework Evaluation Surveys, and training materials used in the agency's telework program are available as a resource for agencies considering establishing a telework program. The Telework Final Report summarizing the pilot findings and the surveys used in the pilot evaluation also are available. These documents can be accessed online by clicking on the Promising Practices Supplemental State Resources link. Wisconsin's Telework Training Webcast also can be accessed online at the following link:
<http://media1.wi.gov/DHFS/viewer/NoPopupRedirector.aspx?peid=595f733f-26e9-4871-8007-e258f9180f6c&shouldResize=False#>.

This document is part of an issue brief on the use of interactive technology for trainings and meetings in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Telework Programs

Wyoming

Summary

The telework program at the Office of Health Quality in the Wyoming Department of Health has been in place since 1996. The program increases flexibility for retaining valuable surveyor staff, is a factor in expanding the candidate pool beyond the Cheyenne metropolitan area, and increases the efficiency of travel to accomplish revisits and complaint visits in this rural state.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Wyoming's telework program, its impact, and lessons learned that may benefit other agencies considering telework programs. The information presented is based on interviews with agency staff and review of documentation supporting the telework program.

Background

The telework program was initiated to increase the agency's ability to retain surveyors living in or relocating to areas outside of the Cheyenne metropolitan area and expand the candidate pool for recruitment into rural areas of the state.

Intervention

Three of the agency's 12 surveyors currently telework. Surveyors who live more than 50 miles from the central office in Cheyenne are eligible to apply for the program; approval is determined on a case-by-case basis by agency management staff. New surveyors may begin employment as teleworkers, prior to passing Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Test. Surveyors are trained in multiple program types, given the small number of staff and facilities in the state. Teleworkers must sign an agreement that documents expectations and states that the agency may revoke telework status at any time.

Teleworking surveyors are supplied with computers and telephone lines, and in some cases, a state vehicle. The agency holds quarterly in-services, typically at the central office, and

conducts weekly calls involving all surveyors whether at facilities, home-based offices, or the Cheyenne office. The 20 - 40 minute calls are used to discuss the week's activities and resolve questions or problems. Additional communication is accomplished by phone, fax, and e-mail. Occasional supervisor home visits occur, in particular to assist with computer questions and issues.

To further support communication and in-person contact with fellow staff members, the agency plans to have teleworking staff spend one week each quarter working in the central office.

Supervision of teleworking staff is accomplished primarily through routine phone and e-mail communication and by monitoring timely completion of reports, with occasional supervisor participation in facility surveys to allow in-person contact and evaluation of teleworker job performance.

Implementation

The agency began the teleworking program with a six-month trial period and two surveyors. At the end of the trial period, agency management and the teleworking staff agreed that productivity, communication, and overall job performance were maintained and it was determined that the program would continue.

Impact

In addition to providing a means for retaining valuable staff who are interested in maintaining employment but must relocate due to family

commitments, the telework program also appears to benefit retention by reducing travel time and providing more flexible schedules for teleworkers, contributing to enhanced job satisfaction according to teleworker feedback. Office-based surveyors seem to value the program as an option that could allow them to retain their position if they must relocate.

The telework program has helped the agency expand recruitment by attracting qualified candidates living outside of the Cheyenne area, many of whom are tied to rural areas of the state due to family commitments or ranching lifestyles.

With teleworking surveyors located in various regions of the state, the agency also is able to reduce travel time for complaint visits and revisits, leaving more time for effective preparation.

Agency management speculate that the telework program has not resulted in decreased travel costs. The agency has maintained the same office space, to accommodate quarterly staff meetings and occasions when teams choose to reconvene in-person to address report writing or complaints.

Lessons Learned

Agency staff emphasize the importance of frequent communication and recommend establishing opportunities for staff to interact face-to-face outside of the survey setting, to ensure that staff "feel connected" at all times.

Management staff work to ensure equity of assignments across teleworking and office-based staff, including responsibility for external communications related to incident reports from providers and questions from the public.

Contact Information and Resources

For more information about the telework program at the Office of Health Quality, Wyoming Department of Health, please contact Jean McLean, Acting Manager, at 307/777-7123 or jmclea@state.wy.us.

Wyoming's Employee Application Form and Memorandum of Understanding used in the agency's telework program are available as a resource for agencies considering establishing a telework program. These documents can be accessed online by clicking on the Promising Practices Supplemental State Resources link.

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