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## **Answers to Frequently Asked Questions Re: Telecommuting**

### **Q. Does a USAID employee has the right to telecommute? Could an employee be forced to work at home?**

A. No, to both questions. Subject to any applicable agreements with our unions, AFSA and AFGE, management decides whether the employee can work off-site, depending on the nature of the position and the characteristics of the employee. Management has the right to end an employee's use of the telecommuting option if, for example, the employee's performance declines or if the arrangement no longer meets the organization's needs.

### **Q. Can telecommuting help an employee with child or other dependent care needs?**

A. Telecommuting can provide valuable assistance with dependent care. Time saved commuting to work can be spent with family members. For example, a parent may need less after-school care for a school-age child, or an adult child may have time to take an aging parent to the doctor. However, employees should not be caring for children, elderly parents, or conducting other personal business when they are working at home.

### **Q. Won't the employee's work suffer without direct, on-site supervision?**

A. The opposite is more often the case, partly because the employee working at home has fewer interruptions and distractions and partly because the individual has a strong incentive to demonstrate the value of working at home.

### **Q. How can the supervisor monitor work performance when the employee is not physically present?**

A. Managers can measure what the employee produces by examining the product or results of the employee's efforts. It is also helpful to use project schedules, key milestones, regular status reports, and team reviews. Supervisors may call employees who are working at home. Employees must be accessible for this purpose as well as to allow USAID to meet its emergency locator requirements while the employee is telecommuting.

### **Q. Can telecommuters follow an alternative work schedule?**

A. During the trial period, No. Following evaluation of the telecommuting and AWS programs this option will be reviewed. The rationale for only allowing one or the other

during the trial period is to give managers and employees an opportunity to adapt to the requirements of these new programs, i.e., turn the programs on gradually and in a fashion that allows for success.

**Q. What about the impact on the office when some employees are working at home?**

A. Certain guidelines must be established to minimize adverse impact on other staff members before employees begin to work at alternate worksites. The overall interests of the office must take precedence over working at alternate sites. A supervisor may not allow an employee to telecommute on a particular day if the needs of the office preclude the employee's absence. Telecommuting should not put a burden on staff remaining in the office. An equitable distribution of workload should be maintained, and methods should be instituted to ensure that main office employees are not saddled with telecommuter responsibilities.

**Q. Is there any kind of USAID work that may not be accomplished via telecommuting?**

A. No classified materials, either printed or electronic, may be taken out of the office. In addition, both the Telecommuter and the corresponding Information System Security Officer (ISSO) must be particularly aware of the need to control Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) information. The Agency's policies on the handling of SBU are contained in USAID General Notices issued by M/IRM 2/3/97 11/9/95, subject: Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) Information Created Processed, Stored, or Transmitted in Electronic Format? and also in 12 FAM 540.

**Q. What equipment and software will the employee need at the home-based worksite and who will provide it?**

A. During the trial period the Agency will provide no hardware to the telecommuter. That point notwithstanding, M/IRM/TCO will provide software and limited assistance in connectivity to USAID databases and E-mail (see below).

**Q. Will USAID provide any support in the area of electronic connectivity, i.e., enabling the Telecommuter to access Agency E-mail and (or) other databases from home?**

A. The Agency has developed dial-in software to enable employees and contractors to access E-mail and other Agency databases (see below). This software is distributed without charge and IRM/TCO will provide support via the following activities: 1) Demonstration of the software installation at the office (not at home) and on Agency computers (not the telecommuter's personal equipment); and 2) To the extent practical, provide telephone support to the telecommuter in resolving access or installation problems on his or her personal computer..

**Q. What are the minimum system requirements for installing and utilizing the**

**Agency's dial-in software on the telecommuter's personal computer?**

A. In order to install and utilize the dial-in software the telecommuter must have the Windows 95 operating system, a Hayes-compatible modem capable of transferring data at a minimum of

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14.4 kilobytes per second, 8 megabytes of Random Access Memory (RAM), 40 megabytes of free space on the hard drive, a CD-ROM drive for the installation of Beyond Mail, and/or a 3.5 inch floppy drive for the installation of Blue Mail.

**Q. Do all telecommuters work with high-tech equipment?**

A. No. While technology can be very helpful to most telecommuters, a simple telephone may suffice for many.

**Q. Who is responsible for maintaining and servicing privately owned equipment used by the telecommuter at home?**

A. The Telecommuter.

**Q. What will USAID provide in the way of computer equipment and software to Telecommuters?**

A. As indicated above, the nature of the work to be performed by the telecommuter will determine what equipment and software, if any, will be required. Aside from software for connecting to USAID databases and E-mail, obtaining computer equipment and software compatible with Agency standards for Word Processing, Spreadsheets, etc., rests with the telecommuter. The telecommuter's use of personal equipment is balanced against the savings in commuting time and greater efficiencies of operation that may be available to the telecommuter by working at home.

**Q. Who pays for any increase in home utility expenses incurred by employees as a result of telecommuting?**

A. Work-at-home arrangements may increase an employee's home utility costs. Balanced against these increases are potential savings to the employee resulting from reduced commuting, child care (during the period the employee would otherwise be commuting to and from work), meals, and clothing expenses. Potential cost and savings to the employee and the Government cannot be viewed in isolation from each other. An agency may not use appropriated funds to pay for items of personal expenses in the absence of a specific statutory authority.

**Q. Are business phone calls made from the home reimbursable?**

A. An employee may be reimbursed for business-related long distance phone calls over the employee's personal phone. GSA regulations (41 CFR 101.7) provide for reimbursement on SF 1164 for telephone calls approved by the supervisor. Agencies may also provide employees with Government telephone credit cards.

**Q. Who is liable for work-related injuries and/or damages at the alternate worksite?**

A. USAID employees suffering from work-related injuries and/or damages while working at home are covered under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (Workers' Compensation). Notwithstanding such coverage, Telecommuters must bear in mind that the Worker's Compensation program is administered by an external entity, the U.S. Department of Labor. Successful processing of claims and awarding of compensation for work related injuries entails, among other requirements, the supervisor's certification that the injury occurred at an official worksite and during work hours. To facilitated coverage under the Worker's Compensation Program, USAID has adapted the Self-Certification Safety Checklist for Home-based Telecommuters originally developed by the General Services Administration (GSA). Completion of this form is mandatory for recurring telecommuting arrangements. Completion of this form by the employee, in conjunction with a telecommuting agreement that specifies the address of the work-site and the hours of duty, should ensure the same protection and coverage under the Worker's Compensation Program as is available to an office-based employee.

**Q. Who is responsible for approving an employee's request to telecommute?**

A. The Telecommuter's immediate supervisor may approve a non-recurring Telecommuting arrangement not to exceed two consecutive days in duration. A recurring Telecommuting arrangement may be approved by the following management officials as indicated in the Implementation of Family Friendly Work Arrangements Action Memorandum of November 24, 1997: Deputy AAs in all regional and PPC, G, and BHR Bureaus. Deputy Office Directors in all Offices of the M Bureau. The Directors of Independent Offices reporting directly to the Administrator. During the pilot period the approval authority shall not be delegated downward from these levels.

**Q. What role do unions play?**

A. In developing its telecommuting policies USAID had the benefit of input from both AFSA and AFGE. When the program was finalized, but prior to implementation, it was submitted to both unions for review and negotiation.

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