

National Institutes of Health
Telework Pilot Project
TELEWORKER TOOLKIT

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF TELEWORK

Telework is your secret to a better bottom line through improved performance and increased morale.

Have you been thinking about telework as an option for you? You are not alone. Telework is growing at a brisk pace with over 10% of the workforce teleworking at least one day per month. It is a work alternative that helps employees maximize their productivity and increase overall satisfaction with their jobs. It also provides employees the opportunity to better balance their work and life issues and to work at times when they need to be the most productive. Simply, telework is a win-win strategy for both the employee and the manager.

WHAT IS TELEWORK?

Telework, the practice of working from home, or from a satellite office or other location, is a work alternative that NIH may offer to employees – an alternative that would benefit the organization, the employee, and the community. NIH will be evaluating the impact of expanding the usage of telework in a pilot program in Year 2001. For the purposes of this pilot project, telework may be conducted a minimum of two days per month to a maximum of five days per week on a consistent basis. Sporadic working after hours, or working at home as needed on weekends to complete a project, does not fall under the guidelines designed for this telework pilot, but may be covered by the already-existing Flexible Workplace Program (see your personnel office for further information about FWP).

TELEWORK TRENDS AND FACTS

Telework is growing at a rapid pace of at least 20% per year in the United States. As of January 2001, about 10% of the U.S. workforce has teleworked at least one or more days per month. According to CyberDialogue, an international Internet research firm, almost 20 million individuals engage in telework arrangements, working one to two days per week at home. Over 80% of current teleworkers work 1-3 days per week at a remote site. Teleworkers typically work one to two days per week at home. They also reported that more than 27 million Americans are “day extenders,” doing after-hours work from home. The GartnerGroup, Inc. predicts that more than 137 million workers will be involved in some sort of remote work by Year 2003.

Telework may be a viable work option for many NIH employees and managers; helping address pressing issues of recruitment, retention, parking, and office space. According to Olsten’s survey of Fortune 1000 companies, over 64% currently have telework programs. Of the firms that did not have programs, over 60% planned to implement a telework pilot within one year. To recruit and retain employee talent, telework is fast becoming the “perk” that appeals to employees. In a recent Washington Post study conducted with over 3,500 information technology workers, the top benefit request of over 50% wanted the ability to telework and have flexible hours. Telework will enable NIH to focus on retaining solid and proven employee talent.

The Families and Work Institute found that 19% of 3000 employees surveyed in the National Study of the Changing Work Force spend at least part of their regular workweek working at home. The 1998 Carlton School of Business study of 50,000 employees indicated that workers who had more flexibility in their jobs averaged two days of absenteeism per year as opposed to six days per year for workers with low flexibility. Only 22% of employees with high flex jobs were looking for other employment in relation to 42% of employees with low flex jobs.

WHY TELEWORK?

There are a variety of reasons to promote telework from both the organizational and employee perspectives. There is an increased need for enhanced customer satisfaction and along with increased work loads and pressures, telework enables workers to be the most productive and effective at critical times. Other factors that drive telework are technological improvements, employees’ desire for increased flexibility, and the need to reduce overhead. When considering telework options the employee should take into account the following: how it meets a business need, the fit of the job tasks, effect on work group, and balancing work and personal issues.

We envision a business environment that will not necessarily confine NIH employees or its customers to a specific physical location. We expect a growing shift from a traditional physical environment to one that utilizes electronic media. Ultimately this will achieve greater customer convenience and improved utilization of NIH resources. At the same time, telework can be exercised to accommodate the needs of current and future employees to help them better balance work and life activities. Telework is recognized not as a luxury, but as a necessary component of the evolving structure of work at NIH.

The goal of the NIH Telework Pilot Project is:

To evaluate benefits, costs, and impacts of telework on employees, management and customers of the NIH.

1. Facilitate increased employee recruitment and retention rates.

Telework has been found to increase levels of satisfaction of teleworkers, managers and coworkers. It helps to retain employees who might otherwise leave employment due to long commute times or difficulty in balancing work and life issues. We encourage use of telework to accomplish flexibility and innovation in meeting customer, management and employee needs.

2. Maintain and encourage high levels of employee and team performance.

Telework forces the rethinking of how work is done and how it can be done more effectively. This promotes the re-engineering of business processes and empowers the employee at point of customer contact. In doing so, the organization can also develop and improve methods of performance management.

3. Encourage telework solutions that seek to provide efficient use of NIH resources.

It is essential to determine the success factors and challenges that lead to efficient telework implementation. This often depends on how the organization allocates present and future resources such as technology, office space and parking facilities.

Telework is a work alternative that provides flexibility in meeting both customer and employee needs, *and* organizational goals. In order to achieve the most effective telework arrangements, NIH has established pilot project guidelines to ensure consistency for common management concerns, yet provide flexibility to address specific employee needs whenever possible. Specific issues such as employee safety, liability, employment-law, security and confidentiality, and employee property will be addressed in the NIH Telework Pilot Project Agreement.

BENEFITS FOR YOU, THE EMPLOYEE

Teleworking employees report the following benefits:

- Improved work environment (less distractions)
- Enhanced job performance (productivity and work quality)
- Improved morale and job satisfaction
- Greater degree of responsibility
- Greater lifestyle flexibility in meeting family and job needs
- Less commute time and stress
- Reduced transportation and work-related costs (parking, meals, etc.)

BENEFITS FOR THE MANAGER

Managers enjoy the benefits of telework – especially more quiet time and fewer interruptions, plus:

- Improved productivity and work quality
- An opportunity to be a more innovative, progressive, successful manager
- More satisfied and loyal employees

- Increased ability to attract and keep valued employees
- Increased access to new labor markets (part-time, semi-retired, other geographic areas)
- Reduced office and parking space needs
- Increased ability to meet air quality or transportation mandates

AGENCY BENEFITS

Employee Recruitment

Many companies use telework as a benefit to attract and retain employee talent. It offers employees the flexibility to work at times when they need to be the most productive. Employees have greater lifestyle flexibility in meeting family and job needs. A 1999 Washington Post survey rated telework as the most sought after job perk among hi-tech workers.

Expanded Labor Pool

For some positions, employees can be hired who live in other areas of the state, country, or world. If specialized talent is difficult to recruit or retain, often telework arrangements can allow those employees to maintain ties with the corporate office via email and phone. The teleworker can make regularly scheduled onsite visits with the supervisor and team. They may not come into the office every day but can still be an effective team player.

Reduced Sick Leave

Home-based teleworkers can continue to work at home with a cold or other minor ailment that may keep them out of the office. In fact, teleworkers work longer hours and more workdays than the average employee. Telework has been found to reduce absenteeism by one to two days per year per telework employee.

Improved Productivity

Teleworkers and their managers report that workers get more done when out of the office. Productivity increases of three to 30% are reported for various types of jobs. These increases are attributed to less distraction, less socializing and less time spent in non work-related activities.

Employee Satisfaction and Retention

A 30% increase in morale was reported by Merrill Lynch for individuals who telework. At AT&T, 71% of surveyed employees reported feeling “more satisfied” with their jobs since telework. A University of Toronto study of 50,000 public and private sector employees demonstrated that only 22% of persons having high-flex jobs were looking for another job as opposed to 42% of employees who had low flexibility in their jobs.

Reduced Stress

Time is a scarce commodity in today’s workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration ranks **stress** among the top 10 reasons for missing work. It is estimated that the American worker spends an average of an hour a day commuting to and from work. Translated into yearly figures, that’s the equivalent of almost six weeks of work. If employees are trying to balance both work and life responsibilities, this is an added stressor.

Facility Cost Savings

If workers share offices on alternate days, the amount of floor space can be significantly reduced. When IBM consolidated 400,000 square feet of office space into a 100,000 square-foot facility at Cranford, New Jersey, the company set it up on the hotel principle. Workers check in with a computerized receptionist that assigns them a cubicle and switches their calls to the appropriate cubby. Employees are often more willing to share office space if they telework two to three days per week.

CHAPTER 2

NIH TELEWORK GUIDELINES

Telework is not a universal employee benefit, but rather an alternative way to meet the needs of the agency. It is a privilege, and therefore NIH and/or any Institute or Center has the right to refuse to make telework available to an employee and to terminate a telework arrangement at any time.

DEFINITION OF TELEWORK

Telework is the practice of working from home, from a GSA Telecommuting Center, or other location. It is a work alternative that NIH may offer to employees that would benefit the agency, the employee, and the work group. Participants must telework a minimum of two days per month up to a maximum of five days per week. Participation is voluntary by both the manager and employee. Working out of the home after hours or as needed on weekends to complete a project does not fall under the guidelines designed for this telework pilot.

CONDITIONS OF TELEWORK

Telework is a voluntary work arrangement. Either the employee or the employee's manager may terminate the arrangement at any time.

Telework is a work alternative. It is not an entitlement. Employees do not have a "right" to telework. Both the employee and manager must agree on the benefits of telework, taking into account the needs of the customer, the job, the work group, the Agency, and the employee's level of performance. It is important to remember that telework is not a viable work arrangement for all positions or well-suited to all employees.

Work standards are the same. The same standards that apply to work performed at the primary office location apply to work performed at the telework location.

Customer service is constant. For NIH customers the telework arrangement should be transparent; that is, the customer should detect no difference in the quality or timelines of service rendered from the primary office or the telework location.

Telework is not a substitute arrangement for dependent care (child and/or elder) or a substitute to accommodate personal or other business endeavors.

Telework is not considered a contract or guarantee of continued employment.

Other Conditions

- Employee's work status, job duties, obligations, responsibilities and conditions of employment with NIH remain unchanged. Salary, retirement benefits and insurance coverage remain unchanged.
- Teleworkers may be required to provide work progress reports and to attend meetings/training specific to telework.
- Provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement must be followed when planning and implementing telework arrangements.
- Telework arrangements must comply with appropriate state and federal laws including the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).
- Telework is not guaranteed for any specific period of time.
- All telework selection decisions, with rationale, will be provided to the employee and will be documented by the employee's manager.
- All teleworkers must enter into a signed agreement with the Agency before telework begins. The agreement indicates that they agree to the terms and conditions as set forth in the agreement.

PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines are provided as tools for prospective teleworkers and managers to assess whether participation in the pilot project is a viable option. They are divided into standard “eligibility requirements” that all participants must meet, plus a list of “teleworker characteristics” that provides a picture of the standard skill set necessary for telecommuting success.

In addition to these participation guidelines, the needs of the workgroup and the customers must be considered before any decision can be made concerning this program.

Eligibility requirements

- Full or part-time permanent employee or Commissioned Officer
- Passed last performance rating of record (average of Level C for CO’s)
- Non-emergency personnel
- Not on Detail from another NIH IC
- Not on Special Leave Procedures
- Not under a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)
- No documented misconduct personnel action on permanent record within the last three years

Successful Teleworker Characteristics

Employees who would be considered successful candidates for telework generally have a number of work-related characteristics in common. These should be taken into consideration in the application process:

- Independent, self-motivated and self-disciplined
- Completes work projects on time with minimal supervision
- Strong organizational and time management skills
- Results-oriented
- Comfortable working alone
- Knowledgeable about organization’s policies and procedures
- Maintains effective working relationships with coworkers
- Sensitive to the effect additional work due to telework might have on coworkers
- Adaptable to changing routines and environments
- Willing to come into office on a regularly scheduled teleworking day, if necessary
- Communicates well with supervisor, coworkers, and customers
- Able to express needs objectively and develop solutions
- Knows job well and has proven track record of performance
- Can create an environment during duty hours that is free of distractions and potential interruptions
- Comfortable with technologies required for telework (computer, telecommunications)

Successful Manager Traits

The characteristics of the manager who supervises teleworkers are important to the success of the arrangement. Managers should review this list before implementing telework arrangements, and be honest in their self-evaluation. They should meet the following criteria:

- Have an open and positive attitude toward telework
- Establish clear and measurable performance objectives
- Communicate well with potential teleworkers and team
- Provide a system for timely and constructive feedback
- Utilize employee input in generating solutions
- Trust the employee to perform duties when away from supervisor’s direct contact

PORTABLE WORK

Selecting teleworkers encourages both management and employees to think differently about work, to participate in cooperative decision-making, and to creatively structure work to maximize the accomplishment of work plan goals and objectives.

Telework may be appropriate for many jobs at the Agency, but not all jobs. To help make that determination, factors to consider may include, but are not limited to:

- The level of oversight necessary to accomplish the job
- The assessment of work spillover to non-teleworkers
- How much face-to-face interaction with coworkers, customers, and others is necessary on a regular basis
- The ability to measure and evaluate a teleworker's job outcomes to ensure work plan goals are met
- The assurance that routine paper flow among staff and mail correspondence with customers is not interrupted by telework
- The assurance that the final work product accomplished through teams is not adversely impacted
- The flexibility to adjust work hours or work days to meet project timelines and to respond to unforeseen situations
- The ability to balance other work schedule options (e.g., Alternative Work Schedules) with a telework schedule
- The ability to arrange for work-related travel to correspond with telework days

Sample portable work categories:

- Analysis
- Auditing reports
- Batch work
- Calculating
- Data entry
- Design work
- Dictating
- Drafting
- Editing
- Work processing
- Writing
- Evaluations
- Field visits
- Graphics
- Meeting with clients
- Project management
- Reading
- Record keeping
- Research
- Telephoning

Telework may not be suitable or practical for employees in positions that require:

- Extensive face-to-face contact with their manager, coworkers, employees other departments, or customers
- Access to material or equipment which cannot be removed or is difficult to remove from the employee's primary work area
- Consistent access to special facilities or equipment that is not available off-site

Some employees may be assigned to projects that require their face-to-face presence with the customer or team, if even on a temporary basis. Depending upon the business need, telework may not be a viable option at all times and the teleworker may be required to spend more time at the office if needed during peak periods.

APPLICATION PROCESS

This application process is:

1. Employees interested in participating in the telework pilot should discuss the possibility with their managers. The employee should submit a **Telework Application** to his/her manager to demonstrate why telework will mutually benefit the agency and employee. Determining the number of telework days and work schedule will be dependent upon various factors such as available technology and remote access, effect on work group and customers, and need for face-to-face interactions.

2. The manager and employee should discuss the application; after which the manager should endorse, modify, or recommend against the arrangement and inform the employee of the decision and the supporting rationale.
3. The **manager and employee should both sign the application**. Whether the manager approves or disapproves the arrangement, the application should be submitted to the IC Telework Coordinator:

IC	Contact	Bldg./Room	Phone
CSR	John Czajkowski	Rockledge II, 3220	5-0908
NIAID	Lennita Lawson	31, 7A19	5-8564
NIDCD	Chris Clements	31, 3C11	2-0508
OD	Eddie Ribas	31, B3C29	2-9203

4. Upon the completion of the selection process, the employee and manager are required to attend telework training before signing the **NIH Telework Pilot Project Agreement**.
5. The manager and teleworker should each maintain a copy of the agreement. The original copy of the Telework Agreement should be forwarded to the IC coordinator; additional copies will be kept by the Telework Pilot Project Coordinator (Alisa Green, NIH Work and Family Life Center, Building 31, Room B3C15).

Voluntary Termination or Withdrawal from Telework

Telework is a voluntary work arrangement. If either employee or manager choose to terminate the Telework Agreement, the manager should document the reasons and effective dates, and the Pilot Exit Forms must be completed by manager and employee and submitted to the IC coordinator. The reason for and date of withdrawal should be noted on this document.

If the employee finds that the telework arrangement is not working for various reasons, the employee must give notice to the manager before returning to the office.

CHAPTER 3

TELEWORKER TOOLS AND INFORMATION

OVERVIEW

The following information is provided to ensure that telework arrangements meet NIH requirements and mutually benefit the agency, employee and work group.

When you begin teleworking, it is important to develop strategies for team communications, use of technology, data security, teambuilding, and home office requirements. Other issues may surface such as performance measurement or coworker resistance. You may find that work processes and communication strategies may need to be adapted a bit. In general though, telework can not only help you become more efficient, but also establish and improve relationships with your work group and manager. Telework may bring up some challenges, but usually these do not appear “overnight” or as soon as telework was implemented. Most likely they have been in existence all along, but just ignored, tolerated or compensated for in some way. Telework encourages you to identify current deficits and find ways to overcome them.

When employees work at the agency site, it can be easier (but not necessarily more efficient) to find ways to compensate for problems. If something isn’t working, you may be able to go and literally find the person or resource and deal with the issue face-to-face. Research shows though, that at any given time, employees have less than a 25% chance in accessing a “real” person or voice on the phone.

Telework can assist the employee to plan effective remote practices, but also to refine current work processes and eliminate inefficiencies. There is an old adage that states that in order for people to change behaviors, they must practice that behavior 20-25 times. This holds true for telework practices as well. Managers and employees are able to practice and adapt their strategies for better work methods and improved outcomes. It truly ends as a win-win situation.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Remote Office Setup

The employee is required to maintain a separate, designated work area which must be detailed on the Telework Pilot Application Form before beginning the arrangement.

The manager is responsible for working with the teleworker to establish a safe, ergonomic office. Teleworkers are responsible for maintaining a safe office free of hazards. Because the agency may be liable for work-related injuries that occur during the course of work, minimum standards listed in the telework agreement should be maintained. This area must also be free of distractions that might affect teleworker performance. In general, NIH will not be inspecting remote offices, but if necessary, teleworkers may need to permit home inspections by NIH. NIH will endeavor to provide 24 hours prior notification before inspection.

The employee is also responsible for establishing and maintaining all aspects of setting up the office, e.g. remodeling, acquiring a desk, seating, electrical support, lighting, and other general equipment, etc. The teleworker is responsible for ensuring that the home office chair is ergonomically correct. The employee may need to purchase an ergonomic chair. If an employee uses the computer two or more hours per day, it is important to ensure that the chair and computer table are ergonomically correct. The saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” holds true for the ergonomic setup in order to prevent future work-related injuries.

The workspace needed is dependent on the following: volume or amount of work, amount of time the office is used; the spread (amount of workspace needed to work); and amount of phone usage. Do an initial survey to identify the most basic needs for furniture, lighting, storage and safety. This survey is located in the NIH Telework Pilot Project Agreement.

Work Schedule and Attendance

The teleworker should have business hours that the employee and the manager have agreed to. The teleworker is also required to attend in-house meetings as scheduled. The employee may need to be flexible and accommodate schedule changes when necessary. In some cases, it may be necessary to establish core hours that the employee needs to be accessible. Some things to consider are:

- Will the employee's flexible work hours affect the team result?
- What types of backup or emergency support may be provided by the remote employee?
- Are there substitutes for face-to-face communication that would be more efficient and effective (e.g. e-mail, chat room, phone conversation, also conference call, voice mail, etc.)?

Time Reporting/Payroll Periods

Existing NIH time reporting policy and procedures apply. Teleworkers are responsible for ensuring time and attendance is accurately recorded at the telework work site. The same pay requirements and rules regarding Fair Labor Standards Act, overtime, holiday pay, sick leave, etc., apply to teleworkers in alternative work sites as they do to those employees in the primary work location. Your manager is responsible for approving time worked and ensuring work performed provides value consistent with the hours recorded.

Work and Life Guidelines

The manager and employee should agree on how personal, family or other issues will be handled. The employee should specify hours they are working. As a teleworker, you may need to devote some time to train your family, friends, and neighbors.

The teleworker should request the family's cooperation by establishing guidelines regarding privacy, interruptions, and use of work area.

- When is it not a time for a family member to interrupt the employee?
- Is phone usage by family members on the work phone restricted during work hours?
- Is it clear that family use of equipment, supplies and work area is not permitted?

The teleworker can establish rules such as "I'm on NIH time right now," or "When I'm on the phone, I should not be disturbed." Potential distractors and conflicting demands must be resolved in advance of the telework arrangement.

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Current findings on telework productivity from the Institute for Distributed Work demonstrate that there is an average 16% increase in productivity with employees who telework. Increases vary from 3% to 30%, mostly due to less distractions, fewer interruptions and reduced socializing at the office. The teleworker is not expected to work more hours or put in more time than in-house employees. When teleworkers begin working offsite, in the first three months, the employee is learning new ways of managing time, establishing priorities or mastering new technology. After a time, the teleworker will typically increase his/her productivity and even find ways to make work processes more efficient.

Before the arrangement starts, you should discuss and specify the performance deliverables with your manager. There are no major formulas to monitor teleworker performance. Deliverables tend to fall into the same four categories that are found in-house.:

- Quantifiable products (how much gets done)
- Quality of work done (how well it gets done)
- Meeting timelines, deadlines (when it gets done)
- Managing priorities (how much is done and how important are each?)

It is the combination of all four factors that count - not just any one of them. It's important how much gets done, but it's equally important that the work is done well, on time and done in a way that lets multiple projects all get handled at the same time. In a workplace that focuses on information exchange and customer service, often the quality and frequency of communications are essential to increased productivity.

An effective teleworker is one who scores well on these four criteria. Consider an employee who turns out a lot of work with good quality, but has trouble juggling multiple priorities or delegating tasks/duties. Would you say this person is a good worker just because of the high volume of work they produce? Of course not - you'd appreciate those strengths, but when looking at the four factors together you see that the total picture has some deficiencies.

Sample evaluation measures could include:

- Feedback or perceptions of employees, managers, customers
- Comparison of task times in the corporate and remote office
- Timeliness and completion of reports and paperwork
- Thoroughness of task completion
- Rapport and communication with colleagues/customers

Other factors also enter into how effective a teleworker is. Consider the degree and amounts of communication that need to occur between team members. If this is lacking, then team productivity can decrease. Data base access and technology efficiency also play an important part in streamlining the work flow.

Ultimately, telework is a win-win situation for all. It enables you to reinforce or adapt current measures, ultimately improving the outcomes of the team.

TEAMBUILDING

When beginning the arrangement, it is best to meet with the manager and work group to ensure that team effectiveness is not disrupted. Include support staff and coworkers so they will have a chance to raise concerns and discuss possible solutions. Some work groups communicate much of this information informally, stopping by another's office to pass on information. Since this spontaneity is reduced, structured phone times, e-mails, audio conferences and well planned meetings replace the existing communications structure.

At first, the group may compensate by increasing the frequency of communication, but this usually tapers off after new routines are established. The team should plan and work toward the same communications goals and determine what types (written or verbal) are needed to maximize performance results. For instance, examine frequency, checkpoints, face-to-face meetings, e-mail and voice mail checks. Determine how the teleworker will access key staff or the supervisor. After a couple of weeks, check the progress of the communications with the team. Re-evaluate and adapt practices that are not working.

One benefit of telework is that communications can become more effective. For example, meetings have agendas and closure. Less time is spent for just "meeting." Even phone conversations can be planned and have agendas.

COWORKER RELATIONS

One issue that may surface is that coworkers often fear they will have more work to do. Teleworkers need to be organized and plan the materials they need to have with them when working offsite. If the teleworker is calling in-house staff to find files, copy or send documents on a continual basis, it can become irritating to support staff or colleagues. It is more common that the supervisor may have more backup tasks to do. The teleworker should discuss with the manager on how in-house support may be needed. This should be addressed before offsite work starts. It is important to realize that with telework, everybody counts. Teleworkers are not more important than other team members.

In most cases, coworkers are very supportive of teleworkers, especially if consistent communications occur. The supervisor and teleworker can use staff meetings to discuss work plan and communications issues or adaptations. Subtle comments can occur, and the teleworker must decide on how to handle comments such as "I wish I had your schedule,

and “Oh sure, you’re working.” There are various ways to handle this. Some teleworkers just ignore it. Others use a sense of humor or ask a question back to the coworker. For example, one response can be: “A little skepticism is healthy, what would you like to know about the arrangement? Or, “Yes, I am much more productive when working at home. I can reach more customers, particularly at 5 p.m. when I would usually be commuting home.”

If it continues to be a problem, the teleworker may want to discuss this with the manager. One strategy is to have a discussion with the entire work unit and specify the ways in which telework benefits the performance of the entire team. Consider the ways that coworkers can benefit (i.e. by having fewer distractions, having increased access to scarce resources such as printers, conference rooms, etc.) Perhaps the teleworker’s office can be used while the employee is offsite. Is the teleworker space open by permission only, open for use, or not available?

In some cases the teleworker may need to take more responsibility to initiate communications. Often coworkers may be reticent to contact the employee at home. This is just a perception that needs to be dispelled. When at home and “on the clock” teleworkers are working, therefore team communications need to remain constant. The teleworker can reinforce with coworkers that they may be contacted when they are offsite.

COMMUNICATIONS

Who has the most control over communication once you leave the primary office? (You do.)

Who has the most responsibility for maintaining communication? (You do.)

If you don’t know about an important meeting, who misses out the most? (You do.)

The manager and employee may need to define communications because spontaneous or sporadic interactions tend to occur less, just because of limited face-to-face contact. Decide which face-to-face meetings need to take place. This may vary depending upon the job, project status and individual needs of the teleworker. Draft a plan with your manager and work group and re-evaluate within a few weeks.

Maintain regular communication with your manager. As a teleworker, you’ll need to keep your supervisor informed about the status of the programs you are working on, your progress, and any difficulty encountered. Think of your manager as a client that needs information on a timely basis.

Customer/Client Communications. Is the telework arrangement seamless to the customer? Does it affect the customer relationship positively? The teleworker may be able to ask the customer directly to ascertain whether the arrangement is invisible. It has been found that teleworkers can provide greater coverage to customers since they can reach them at times when they might otherwise be commuting or unavailable.

Phone Etiquette. Phone use from a remote site should provide the same professional demeanor as displayed at the office.

- The work group should have a way to leave a message when the teleworker cannot answer the phone.
- Have an agreement that the manager will leave messages when s/he calls. The teleworker will then know that the hand-up on the answering machine or voice mail is not an important business message that was lost.
- What kinds of calls should the receptionist forward immediately?
- How often does the teleworker and work group call in to obtain voice mail messages?
- Agree on times the teleworker will check e-mail each day
- Agree on times the teleworker will be available to accept calls from the office
- What are hotline strategies? (How to reach teleworker in an emergency)

Telephone Contact – How will the teleworker handle each?

- Other family answering
- If home line is busy – What is back-up strategy for coworker or manager?
- If coworkers call and there is no answer, have them leave a message.

Telephone Professionalism

- Answering the phone from a remote location should provide the same professional demeanor as required in the office. This holds true, not only for your customer callers, but for coworkers and manager.
- Instruct family members on when and when not to answer the phone, particularly if you are using a residential line.

Teleworker Availability

- Decide if the teleworker's home telephone number will be given out, to whom and under what circumstances.
- Determine if voice mail is needed or an answering machine will suffice. Most callers find busy signals to be extremely frustrating.
- The teleworker must take responsibility to check voice mail at designated time. In most cases, telework helps improve accessibility.

SUPPORT STAFF DUTIES

When employees go offsite, consider how the duties of in-house workers may change. Sometimes support staff or work colleagues need to communicate or refer additional information on to teleworkers. Duties such as copying, faxing, and other clerical tasks can be increased due to requests from teleworkers. Review how information is currently disseminated to ensure that corporate staff is not taking on a greater amount of unnecessary work. On the other hand, it has also been found that the teleworker may conduct more of their own administrative tasks, thus eliminating some of the workload of support staff. After several weeks offsite, these issues will surface and may require adapting or streamlining the current work processes.

OTHER DEPARTMENT WORK INTERFACES

If teleworkers utilize and exchange information with other operational areas within the agency, these other department work processes may not support the remote employee as efficiently as if the employee were on-site. Questions to address include:

- What are current transactions with other departments?
- What communication adaptations may be needed with these departments?
- How will other department work products be made available to the teleworker?
- How will response times be maintained?

Some of the deficits between teleworkers and other departments may not occur immediately, but become visible over a period of time.

SUPPLIES/DELIVERY/REFERENCE MATERIAL

Teleworkers may pick up office supplies on days they are in the primary office. A decision must also be made to determine what reference materials need to be duplicated for the remote office.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

When first beginning the telework arrangement, teleworkers may need to re-evaluate how they are most efficient in their home office. Sometimes teleworkers feel they must be available or working at all times. Just as you may take a break at the office, it is important to also take occasional or needed breaks when teleworking. If you are going to be concentrating on a specific task and do not want to be interrupted, then leave a message on your voice mail that you will check messages at a certain time. This gives the caller an idea of your accessibility.

Establish goals: Develop a list of goals and assignments for the days you telework. At the end of the day, go over the list and see how much you've been able to accomplish. It's helpful to start the list a couple of days before you're teleworking. This helps to plan for all the resources you'll need to support your activities at home.

Set deadlines: While teleworking, follow the same rules for deadlines as if you were in the office. If you're mailing reports to the office, send them so they arrive the day they're due or earlier. If you're sending your work electronically via a computer, it should also arrive on time.

In the morning establish a routine to begin work or create a "going to the office" ritual. When you travel to an office, teleworkers suddenly realize that dressing for work and commuting are part of their ritual for obtaining a mindset to start the day. When working at home, teleworkers often find that having a morning cup of coffee or some other activity may be needed to obtain that same mindset. During the work-day, pace yourself to avoid burnout. Teleworkers have found that they can work 3-4 hours without realizing how much time has gone by. It is also beneficial to establish a target time to end your work for the day. .

CHALLENGES

Telecommuting is not for every employee. For the employee who telecommutes, the following issues can be problematic.

Overwork

One perception is that employees are doing less or are engaged in personal tasks. However, the vast majority of teleworkers want to keep this arrangement, therefore they tend to over-produce. Overworking can be an issue because the PC is also in close proximity and 1-2 hours of extra work can be easily conducted at nights or on weekends. The Carleton School of Business found that workers with high flex jobs performed 47 hours of work per week as compared to 42 hours for employees in low flex jobs.

Family distractions

Telecommuting can sometimes add to family stress. Some teleworkers have reported that their spouses resent leaving for work now that their partner is able to stay at home. If one spouse works at home, teleworkers need to establish guidelines for family interruptions. Sometimes neighbors think work-at-homers aren't really working, therefore may interrupt the work during the day.

Social isolation

Some employees miss the social aspects of working with other people and the face-to-face interactions in keeping up-to-date. This becomes more of an issue for full time teleworkers and is not usually an issue for part-time teleworkers. Employees need to both establish and initiate regular communications with their team members. It also helps if they can remain connected via involvement with other social functions that occur at work.

Loss of promotions

Some employees fear that they will be left out of the loop and ignored for future promotions. According to a survey conducted by AT&T, many workers would like to telecommute, but were afraid to approach their supervisor. They were worried that their supervisors might think they were less committed to hard work. In a survey conducted with 17,000 teleworkers in 1997, results showed that teleworkers received a higher proportion of promotions than their stay-at-work counterparts.

IN CONCLUSION

The essential key to telework success is the opportunity for the stakeholders involved - especially the telemanagers and teleworkers - to discuss and plan strategies that will enable them to implement effectively. The good news is that telework allows team members and work groups to refine and make their current work processes better, and help ensure the success of the program.

CHAPTER 4

FAQS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following frequently asked questions are ones that potential teleworkers, coworkers and managers often ask. If you have other questions or need more detailed answers about telework, the NIH Policy Agreement and Tool Kits are excellent resources as well.

1. Is telework an option for all employees, work groups and managers?

Quite simply, it's not for everyone. Some employees need the physical separation between work and home. Some people find it easier to concentrate seated in their cubicle with daily office operations going on all around them. Some work projects require that the employee be in-house in order to meet deadlines or business needs. Telework isn't for everyone, and it may not be suited for every job or employee.

2. Do temporary employees have the opportunity to telework?

Telework may be offered to NIH employees who meet the eligibility requirements listed in the Participation Guidelines in the NIH Telework Policy. At present, participation in the pilot is limited to persons who are full- and part-time permanent Federal employees or Commissioned Officers with NIH. Temporary employees are, however, eligible for the already-existing NIH Flexible Workplace Program, and should consult their personnel offices for details.

3. Is it effective to telework one day per week or less?

When an employee only teleworks one to two times a week or less, the employee can commit those days to the main part of their desk work. That is, the employee can be doing most of their writing, analysis, phone conversations, etc. on those days that they are teleworking. This allows them to work without distractions or interruptions.

4. Are managers able to telework?

The answer is absolutely. The basic skills needed to successfully manage employees are communication, leadership, organizational skills and vision. If a manager begins to telework, the necessity to master these skills is increased. The essence of being a manager is being able to organize both employees and resources in an effective manner. As a manager who teleworks, this is no different than the in-house manager.

A manager who teleworks must have the faith and trust of the employees who work for him/her. If a manager returns phone calls and e-mails promptly, answers questions to the employee's satisfaction, measures performance by employee deliverables, and generally leads by example, the actions of his/her employees will typically follow in their footsteps.

5. Should the teleworker have more flexibility with the job?

Flexibility is an issue that the employee and manager should discuss on a situational basis. Although the teleworker may have some flexibility in determining when the work is done, one of the most important factors found in a successful teleworker is accessibility. Teleworkers should make themselves available to co-workers and customers during designated business hours, let them know how they can be reached during this time, and respond within a reasonable amount of time. The teleworker can also be available for emergency situations. Whether it's with a pager, cell phone, or another method, the team needs to know that they can count on the teleworker in a difficult situation.

6. How much self-discipline is needed to be a teleworker?

In order to work independently, telework employees must have demonstrated self-discipline and initiative in their current job or in past performance reviews. When working remotely, it is helpful for employees to set work schedules and break times so under-working or overworking is not an issue. It may be unrealistic to expect the teleworker to sit at his/her desk all day. It is actually more efficient to take short breaks in order to enhance productivity while working. This often gives the teleworker a chance to “clear” the mind and gain a fresh look at a particular issue or solution.

7. As a coworker of a teleworker, will my work responsibilities change or will I have to take on extra work?

The answer to this question varies upon the job tasks conducted by the teleworker and amount of in-house support staff available. If there are duties that the teleworker can no longer do because they are offsite, then decide how to streamline, eliminate or disperse these duties. The teleworker, in most cases, becomes less reliant on in house staff to accomplish work tasks. Teleworkers typically take on more responsibilities to accomplish their own administrative or clerical tasks. If in-house staff is picking up more duties, then the manager and team should discuss how duties can be shared or how teleworkers may in turn assist persons in the office. Teleworkers can sometimes perform emergency or backup tasks, if needed.

8. What kind of family care arrangements are required?

If the position and tasks permit, a teleworker may construct a flexible schedule that enables them to better accommodate child or elder care needs. However, **telework is not a substitute for dependent care.** NIH requires that the teleworker establish dependent care arrangements during their designated work hours. All potential interruptions and distractions should be resolved before the telework arrangement begins.

9. How do I handle coworker resentment from employees who don't telework?

Some things about the office rarely change. Behind-the-scenes gossip is one of them. Teleworkers tend to be self-starters and often choose to ignore this type of nuisance. But there are other options as well. The manager can address telework at a team meeting and stimulate discussion from coworkers. Sometimes the selection process or the details of the arrangement need to be explained. The manager can also ensure that each member is recognized for his or her contributions to the team.

Teleworkers can also approach the subject head-on and ask coworkers if they have questions about telework and how it works for you. One teleworker would start these discussions by saying, “A little skepticism is certainly healthy...so what would you like to know.” Teleworkers should be open to questions and not become defensive about how hard they are working. They can state in positive terms that there are fewer interruptions, customers can reach them more easily, or there is more time to communicate with customers. Give specific examples stating how telework has improved the job performance. Resentment is often a sign of inadequate communication. Use this as an opportunity to improve daily or weekly communications with colleagues. This situation can be used to both promote better team communication as well as clear up confusion about telework.

10. Will the teleworker need to communicate differently with the work group and supervisor when teleworking?

As you may already know, telework requires a certain amount of accountability. Employees who telework are expected to return e-mail and phone calls on a timely and regular basis and to finish their work on time and in a professional manner. When a team is spread over a distance, accountability is a crucial part of the equation. Each member of the team is now accountable to every other member. If team members were good communicators before telework, they already fit the profile of a good teammate and can be expected to incorporate those qualities into their work. They are in the habit of being accountable and most likely will have no trouble doing their part contributing to the success of the team.

While telework focuses on other types of communication rather than “old-fashioned” face-to-face discussion, it also benefits from regular, effective meetings, especially if there is a team involved. Therefore, if a telework employee who usually comes into the office once a week is placed on a team to complete a project, he/she might benefit from increasing his/her trips to the office to twice a week. It will also allow the group to make sure that all members understand their roles, as well as evaluate communication within the group.

11. How does the teleworker communicate efficiently with customers when teleworking?

One of the keys to successful telework is that it is an opportunity to enhance your accessibility to internal or external customers. The teleworker must communicate their hours of availability via email, phone, pager, or FAX. It may also be essential to change the voice mail message to inform callers the alternative ways the teleworker can be reached. It is best to set aside times during the day to check messages, as well as return them and answer the phone. It has been found that teleworkers can often respond more quickly to customers because they can be reached easily and are not encountering distractions at their normal duty station. They can also increase customer coverage by communicating with their customers during the times when other employees are commuting to and from work.

12. Is telework a permanent arrangement?

Telework is a voluntary arrangement, which can be terminated if it is not meeting the business needs of the work group, or employee.

13. Will all office equipment and phone lines be provided to the teleworker by the organization?

While it obviously differs from one situation to the next, NIH may provide certain equipment for employees, if the business case is made or if technology and/or funding is available.

14. Will NIH provide furniture for the home office?

NIH is not responsible for provision of furniture for the employee’s home office. NIH staff is available for assistance in ergonomic and safety recommendations. The NIH Telework Agreement also provides a remote office inspection list that employees and managers can use as a guide to ensure the home-office meets safety and security requirements.

15. Will the teleworker lose out on promotional opportunities?

This question is most often asked because people think that teleworkers are employees that are “never around.” In fact, some teleworkers are in the office more than they are at home. They usually work remotely only one or two days a week and are in the office the rest of the time. Therefore, they aren’t easily forgotten. Also, most teleworkers are given the chance to work outside of the office because they show initiative, responsibility and decision making abilities. In the long run, these are qualities that make a person an above-average candidate for promotion. The teleworker is also responsible for tracking career and promotional opportunities.

16. In general, will the teleworker obtain extra privileges?

The teleworker should not have any special privileges or opportunities that are not given to other employees. Telework is not an employee right; it is a work alternative made available to proven performers.