

SSW Telecommuting Policy

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Introduction

Telecommuting, also known as telework, is a work strategy that is made possible by today’s electronic and increasingly paperless work environment. An employee who is telecommuting is as much “at work” as if he/she were physically present in the work setting. Our program includes two forms of telecommuting:

1. **“Defined Telecommuting”** which allows employees to work outside their normal physical place of work for a predictable period of time in order to reduce distractions and thereby improve employee efficiency.
2. **“Emergency Telecommuting”** is an option for employees who can and want to work but cannot be physically present in the office do to an unexpected life event or unsuitable working conditions within the employees’ usual working space.
3. **“Temporary Telecommuting”** which allows employees to work outside their normal physical place of work during curtailment or other defined, short periods of time that are not consistent or ongoing schedules.

Why telework is right for the School of Social Welfare

The nature of the work lends itself to telework.

Many of our staff already interact with coworkers and clients remotely (i.e. g-chat, conference calls, emails, cell phones, etc.). They adjust their time according to the client needs and/or meetings. The nature of our work does sometimes require “in person” interactions; however a significant portion of their work can be performed remotely, which has been successfully demonstrated since 2015. Telecommuting should not result in any negative impact on our operational needs.

Telework supports employee retention, lowering undesirable turnover.

“UC permits a variety of flexible work arrangements, which can help you achieve a successful work-life balance, make you feel better and help you be more productive.”¹

Telecommuting is part of the total rewards of working for the University. This would highlight our dedication to a work/life balance, understanding regarding commuting costs and time and therefore add to the employee lifecycle experience. Retaining existing staff helps minimize operational disruption and the cost of backfilling a vacancy (estimated at 90-200% of staff salary)² as well as ensuring that institutional knowledge stays within the department.

We now have technology that helps monitor performance and productivity, as well as improving our emergency preparedness.

Productivity will continue to be monitored by managers and/or supervisors. Employees will continue to work pre-approved schedules, will remain available as agreed upon in the formal agreement, and will have regular check-in meetings with their supervisors. Being prepared to work remotely is a key element of emergency preparedness.³

Telework offers improved employee morale and possible improved productivity.

Telecommuting could help improve that morale as it has in other organizations, potentially reducing staff turnover. Maximizing existing University non-cash rewards like telework also helps retain staff. “...teleworkers are more likely to report higher job satisfaction (an outcome related to retention). They also experience greater support for performance on the job. When compared with non-teleworkers, more teleworkers reported having clear performance expectations, being held accountable for results, and a greater sense of empowerment.”⁴ Approximately 20% of Federal employees participated in telework programs in 2012. When surveyed, those who participated were 8% more likely to report satisfaction with their jobs.⁵

Eligible employees already have the required equipment to telework. Social Welfare makes no commitment to provide additional equipment to aid telecommuting. However, telecommuting may result in lower overhead costs for the School (utilities, supplies, etc.). In addition, “...there are financial benefits for telecommuters who normally drive alone to work. Their savings on fuel costs are substantially more than their increase in home energy costs.”⁶

Telework may reduce employee absenteeism and lateness while increasing commitment and retention.⁷ Telecommuters may be less likely to use sick days for their own minor illnesses. While they may take an entire day off for a minor illness or medical appointment, being able to telecommute lends itself to working on those days. In 2013, nine federal agencies reported reductions in employee absenteeism as a result of telecommute programs. Five reported improvements in employee retention.⁸

¹ (Work-Life Balance: Flexible Work Arrangements and Telecommuting)

² (Snodgrass)

³ (Management, 2013 Status of Telework in the Federal Government: Report to the Congress)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ (Arif, Darr and Norgren)

⁷ (Konrad and Mangel)

⁸ (Management, 2013 Status of Telework in the Federal Government: Report to the Congress)

Telework saves energy and reduces emissions.⁹

By reducing building energy usage, telecommuting advances UC Berkeley's Carbon Neutral by 2025 goal. In addition, as little as one telecommute day per week can save energy by reducing lights.¹⁰ Employees benefit through lessened wear and tear on their vehicles and reduced spending on public transportation.

Sample telework agreements are available that protect both the University and the employee, reducing perceived risk.

The telework agreement specifies what is required of both parties.

Defined Telecommuting

For the purpose of this program, "Defined Telecommuting" means an Employee works one specific fixed workday per workweek outside the office environment. Any requests for more than one workday a week consistently away from the defined work location will need to be approved by the Assistant Dean of Administration and Finance.

Defined telecommuting employee eligibility criteria

Employees who meet the following criteria are eligible to participate in Defined Telecommuting.

1. The employee's position, assignments, tasks, and role are suitable for telecommuting, as defined in the Telecommuter Position Assessment
2. The supervisor/manager has completed the Telecommuting Feasibility Assessment and deemed the employee eligible
3. The employee is exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)
4. The employee has completed their probationary period
5. The employee has a performance rating of "3" or higher on his/her most recent performance evaluation, has not been placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), and has not been counseled or disciplined for poor performance in the calendar year before the telecommute schedule would begin
6. The employee works efficiently and effectively with minimal supervision, and demonstrates understanding of work standards, processes, and customer service with minimal correction by supervisor or manager
7. The employee has voicemail enhanced unified messaging on their phone line so voicemails will be sent as emails.

Defined Telecommuting Conditions

Telecommuting is voluntary. It is privilege, not a right, and can be revoked by SSW if the Employee's performance suffers, and/or the needs of SSW or the University cannot be effectively addressed, and/or the employee does not fulfill his/her responsibilities. Defined Telecommuting may be terminated immediately at any time by either party, upon written notice to the other party. If there is a frequency/pattern with being out sick or vacation requests before or after but not on your telecommuting day, telecommuting agreement may be revoked.

⁹ (Arif, Darr and Norgren)

¹⁰ Ibid.

SSW management is responsible for selection of interested parties, and potentially not all employees will be able to participate in this initiative due to operational needs. There is no defined limit on the number of employees who may participate in Defined Telecommuting. Employees may request Defined Telecommuting at any time.

Once an employee's request for defined telecommuting is approved, the employee's telecommuting day is "fixed" unless it is renegotiated and agreed upon by both employee and supervisor. If a holiday occurs on the employee's defined telecommuting day, the employee does not have the option of a "make-up" day or trading telecommuting days with other employees.

If a supervisor who manages non-exempt employees requests telecommuting, the supervisor and manager must identify an on-site escalation point for the supervisor's telecommuting day, as well as contingencies that will be communicated to all employees as a standard operating procedure. The on-site escalation point for the supervisor's telecommuting day should be documented in the telecommuting agreement.

The employee and supervisor will agree upon the telecommuting work schedule. This schedule will include the general and/or specific assignments or tasks to be completed by the employee on telecommuting days.

The agreed upon work schedule will be inserted into the employee's Telecommuting Agreement, and may also include the method and timing of scheduled check-ins on telecommuting days, if required by the supervisor.

If substantive changes in the employee's telecommuting work schedule and/or assignments and tasks need to be made, the supervisor and employee will work together to revise the work schedule. Minor and/or short term changes may be handled as needed via email communication between the supervisor and the employee. Employee initiated schedule changes may only be made with advance approval of the supervisor.

Supervisor approval is required to take University-owned equipment, records, and materials from the premises. If such approval is granted, the Employee must provide a secure location for University-owned equipment and materials, and will not use, or allow others to use, such equipment for purposes other than university business. All equipment, records, and materials provided by the university shall remain university property.

Request process

Employees who wish to apply must notify their supervisor in writing a minimum of two work weeks before telecommute would begin. The request is then evaluated by the supervisor. If the position is eligible for telecommuting and the request was approved, the employee, supervisor and manager complete the Defined Telecommuting Agreement.

Employee responsibilities

1. Maintain or exceed productivity, work standards, and customer service requirements regardless of work location
2. Maintain the same schedule at SSW (e.g., 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Monday – Friday) previously approved by the supervisor
3. Maintain required availability and visibility, including use of chat, email, text, teleconferencing tools, and telephone. Respond to any work-related communication in a timely manner.
4. Sign the formal telecommuting agreement and complete the campus telecommute safety checklist, including discussion and agreement on telecommuting worksite to minimize likelihood of injury
5. Provide requisite internet connectivity as defined by CSS IT
6. Be available to come into the office for meetings, training or if a business need arises.

7. Provide his/her contact information while telecommuting to his/her supervisor and other employees within the unit. Indicate the day's location (e.g., "telecommuting") on physical signage in the usual workspace.
8. The employee, at his/her expense, will provide all supplies and software, equipment and furnishings and insurance arrangements needed to work at the alternative site. No additional supplies or equipment will be provided by SSW.
9. The employee is responsible for any and all equipment and software that is used at the remote work site and accepts financial responsibility for any equipment that is lost, stolen or damaged because of the employee's negligence, misuse or abuse.
10. The employee will maintain a safe and secure work environment, and will allow the university access to assess safety and security, upon reasonable notice.
11. The employee will report work-related injuries to the Supervisor at the earliest reasonable opportunity.
12. The employee agrees to allow the university reasonable access to its equipment, records, and materials. University equipment located at the remote work site is subject to all policies and restrictions related to use of university-owned property.

Manager/supervisor responsibilities

1. Complete the Telecommuter Position Assessment to determine whether the position will be eligible for telecommuting within a particular team. If the position is deemed ineligible for telecommuting, all staff in that position within the manager's team will not be eligible to participate at this time.
2. If the position is eligible (based on #1 above), complete the Telecommuting Feasibility Assessment to determine whether the individual employee is eligible.
3. Determine the number of employees in each team allowed to telecommute each eligible work day.
4. Ensure that a sufficient number of employees within each unit are available within the physical office environment throughout the week to ensure that employees have the opportunity to share and learn from each other through face-to-face informal discussion.
5. Monitor and assess ongoing telecommute impact on workload, productivity, team morale, and customer service.
6. Notify employee of any critical or mandatory meetings that require in-person attendance within a reasonable timeframe.
7. Promptly report any and all work-related injuries.
8. All other current supervisory responsibilities and obligations remain intact.

Emergency Telecommuting

Unlike Defined Telecommuting, "Emergency Telecommuting" is not planned. Emergency Telecommuting allows an employee who can work to carry out their normal job responsibilities outside their normal physical space of work or to continue working during long term power outages or unsuitable working conditions within the usual working space.

In addition to the above conditions for Defined Telecommuting, the following additional requirements apply to Emergency Telecommuting:

1. Emergency Telecommuting by an employee will be approved by his/her Supervisor on an "as needed" basis.
2. To engage in Emergency Telecommuting the employee must submit a request via email to his/her supervisor (or designee if the supervisor is unavailable). The request should be submitted as soon as the

Employee becomes aware of the need to emergency telecommute. The Employee's request does not need to be elaborate and must include:

- a. "Request for Emergency Telecommuting" in the email subject header.
 - b. The reason the employee is requesting permission to Emergency Telecommute, e.g., "My child is sick and needs to stay home from school today."
 - c. Days and hours of the Emergency Telecommuting period, e.g., "I need to be out on (insert date)."
 - d. The alternate work site address, e.g., "I will be working at the following address: XXXX"
 - e. Any arrangements that need to be made to transfer any of the employee's work to others who will be working in the work environment.
 - f. A description of how the Employee will communicate with others during the Emergency Telecommuting period. This must include backup and emergency contacts, e.g., "You can reach me at 510-XXX-XXXX or 510-XXX-XXXX."
3. The Supervisor will approve/disapprove the employee's request via return email. The employee should not assume that Emergency Telecommuting has been approved until the supervisor's approval email has been received.
 4. If Emergency Telecommuting is not approved, the employee will need to take a sick/vacation day as appropriate.
 5. If Emergency Telecommuting is approved, the supervisor will then inform others in the employee's unit that the employee will be Emergency Telecommuting on that day.
 6. Approved Emergency Telecommuting days will otherwise be considered as normal work days and are not absences.

Temporary Telecommuting

Temporary Telecommuting allows an employee who can work remotely to carry out their normal job responsibilities outside their normal physical space of work, for example, during curtailment or other planned disruption to onsite workspace.

In addition to the above conditions for Defined Telecommuting, the following additional requirements apply to Temporary Telecommuting:

1. Temporary Telecommuting by an employee will be approved by his/her Supervisor on an "as needed" basis.
2. To engage in Temporary Telecommuting the employee must submit a request via email to his/her supervisor (or designee if the supervisor is unavailable). The Employee's request does not need to be elaborate and must include:
 - a. Days and hours of the Temporary Telecommuting period, e.g., "I request to work from home on (insert date)."
 - b. The alternate work site address, e.g., "I will be working at the following address: XXXX"
 - c. Any arrangements that need to be made to transfer any of the employee's work to others who will be working in the work environment.
 - d. A description of how the Employee will communicate with others during the Emergency Telecommuting period. This must include backup and emergency contacts, e.g., "You can reach me at 510-XXX-XXXX or 510-XXX-XXXX."
3. The Supervisor will approve/disapprove the employee's request via return email. The employee should not assume that Emergency Telecommuting has been approved until the supervisor's approval email has been received.
4. If Temporary Telecommuting is not approved, the employee will need to take a sick/vacation day as appropriate.

5. Approved Temporary Telecommuting days will otherwise be considered as normal work days and are not absences.

FAQs

Q: John Doe works Monday – Wednesday in the office, every other Thursday at home, and Fridays on campus. If John resigns, does a new incumbent have to work this same schedule?

A: No. Telecommuting and other flexible schedules are not assigned to a particular position.

Q: Why are non-exempt employees not included in this program?

A: The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) has strict guidelines for the type of work and supervision necessary for non-exempt positions. This policy does not include non-exempt employees to ensure we remain compliant with the FLSA. (Note that the interactive process is a separate subject.)

Q: Are alternative work schedules included in this policy?

A: No. Alternative work schedules are distinct from telecommuting and are not part of this policy. Employees should discuss alternative work schedules with their supervisors.

Q: How will we assess telecommuting's impact on productivity?

A: Supervisors and managers are accountable for evaluating and reporting any impact on productivity using existing tools.

Q: Are all exempt positions automatically eligible to participate?

A: No. Each position must be evaluated for feasibility by the employee and supervisor using the defined process and tools.

Works cited

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