Office of Human Resources

Telecommuting Guidelines for UWL Employees

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1. Introduction

UWL recognizes the evolving workforce reflected in the labor marketplace and is committed to a renewed interest in maximizing operational efficiency. To meet the changing needs of UWL, the university permits remote work arrangements for employees when their position is suitable for such operations. Human Resources, supervisors, and employees will be required to collaborate and develop workplace expectations surrounding on-campus, hybrid, or full telecommuting working environments. These conversations should include:

- **Establishing expected hours of work/schedule.** For instance, if an employee is actively caring for a child or family member, any proposed remote work schedule should reflect that time spent in this activity is not considered work time and appropriate leave should be used during those times.

- **Balancing employee presence in virtual and on-site meetings.** Supervisors should establish clear expectations on how employees should participate in meetings. Microsoft Teams or Zoom should continue to be used to provide all meeting attendees the opportunity to participate.

- **Establishing expectations for focused, uninterrupted time for completing job responsibilities and attending meetings.** If an employee is unable to set boundaries for work time, then the employee is expected to use leave.

- **Establishing/confirming performance management expectations and metrics of monitoring work performance and ensuring accountability.** Supervisors will be required to undergo annual training to help support and maintain appropriate measures for accountability.

2. Purpose

This guideline helps university leadership and managers in determining what positions and employees are well-suited for regular or occasional telecommuting/remote work. To the extent that it supports the mission of the university and does not hinder the goal to reestablish a vibrant on-campus population of faculty, staff and students, UWL leadership permits the use of appropriate flexible and alternative work options for employees. *Telecommuting* is defined as an alternative employment arrangement in which an employee performs their job functions from an approved alternate worksite other than the employee's primary headquarters location (main office), one or more days per month on a standard and recurring basis.

This guideline **does not** address instances where employees have a medical condition or need for medical accommodation. These employees may seek leave or accommodations in accordance with the federal and/or Wisconsin Family Medical Leave Act, and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act, as applicable. Other extenuating circumstances expressed by employees should be evaluated by supervisors and school, college, or division heads on a case-by-case basis.

In compliance with the UW System Administrative Policy SYS 1228: Telecommuting this guideline outlines the requirements for supporting telecommuting arrangements (also known

as remote work or telework) for limited term, academic staff and university staff members. This guideline is designed to supplement and inform the use of the UW System Telecommuting agreement to support the preferences of the employee while meeting department/unit goals and the needs of our constituents.

Two critical steps must be followed to determine telecommuting suitability:

- **Step 1:** Determine the suitability of **positions** based upon job duties and responsibilities.

- **Step 2:** Determine the suitability of **employees** based upon past work performance.

Step 1: Determine Which Positions are Conducive to Telecommuting

A position may be considered suitable for telecommuting if some or most of its responsibilities can be performed away from the regular work location. The change in work location should not impact productivity, customer service, operational efficiency, or team collaboration. The determination should be first based upon the type of work, and not just on employee performance. The below table is merely a suggestion and does not comprise an exhaustive list.

Titles conducive to telecommuting may include, but are not limited to:	**Tasks accomplished by telecommuting may include, but are not limited to:**
- Accountant or Financial Specialist - Administrative Specialist - Artist (Graphic or Technical) - Auditor - Benefit/Payroll Specialist - Budget Planner - Communication/Media Specialist - Editor/Technical Writer - Information Systems Specialist (Database, Network Administrator, Web Development) - Marketing Specialist - Procurement Specialist - Researcher …and more.	- Auditing - Analyzing Data - Budgeting - Calculating - Computer Programming - Data Analysis and Entry - Editing - Graphics work - Payroll - Policy/Procedure Development - Purchasing/Procurement - Research - Software/Web Development - Writing - Academic Course Logistics

Conversely, certain titles and their associated duties and responsibilities may not be conducive to telecommuting. The below table is merely a suggestion and is not intended to be exhaustive.

Titles requiring significant on-campus responsibilities include, but are not limited to:	Tasks requiring an on-campus presence may include, but are not limited to:
• Automotive Equipment Technician • Buildings/Grounds/Custodial Supervisor • Carpenter • Coach/Athletic Trainer • Custodian/Facility Repair/Gardener • Electrician • Inventory Control Coordinator • Laboratory Technician • Power Plant Operator • Police Officer/Dispatcher/Sergeant • Shipping & Mailing Associate • Steamfitter/HVAC Technician	• Cash Handling/Customer Service • Cleaning/Facility Repair/Remodeling • Driving/Delivery/Storage/Inventory • Constructing/Assembly • Front Office/Reception • Planting/Trimming/Mowing • Preventative Maintenance • Security/Patrolling/Law Enforcement • Direct services to students (teaching, advising, etc.)

When telecommuting is being recommended for a position type that exists in two or more units within a Division, it is recommended that the decision be discussed across unit directors/deans in order to maximize consistency in how duties are viewed.

In all cases, Human Resources must approve that the position is capable of telecommuting.

Remote Site Tools and Equipment

UWL **may** be able to provide equipment for telecommuting employees in accordance with their responsibilities. This generally consists of computers (desktop with monitor or laptop), mice, keyboards, and university phone number as accessed through the Microsoft Teams or Cisco environment. Printers, copiers, scanners, fax machines, shredders, white boards, office chairs, and other traditional office supplies will continue to be located on campus, and **not** provided to the employee. Telecommuting employees that seek to have these items at their remote site are required to purchase them with their own resources unless a special arrangement is made where **specific** university-owned equipment is authorized for use at the remote location.

Information technology skills and requirements, such as regular and secure access to Wi-Fi networks also play a large part in determining if telecommuting is possible. Internet access and telephone services are required for telecommuting and interested employees must provide their own connectivity. Some questions to ask include:

- Is the employee able to have access to the needed equipment to perform their job function? Is university-owned equipment available for use remotely?

- Does the employee have access to an internet connection in order to complete their tasks, and communicate with their supervisor and team? This connectivity must be under the control of the employee and not a third-party (e.g., the local library, espresso bar, or the home of a friend).

- Does the employee's core responsibilities require access to equipment, materials, and files that can only be accessed on site?

- Is the employee required to be on-site for face-to-face meetings with supervisors, other employees, students, or customers? Or can this contact be done electronically

- Supervisors should also consider issues such as: How does on-site or face-to-face meetings contribute to the mission and goals of the university? Within a unit, how does telecommuting affect the overall work climate? Equity and morale across employees?

Hybrid Telecommuting

Most positions may be suited for a certain amount of telecommuting even if many of the responsibilities must be done at the primary headquarters location. These roles could be considered for a limited amount of telecommuting. This is considered a hybrid telecommuting role and is likely to be the model for most teams.

Each position should be considered individually, per the responsibilities of the role, to determine if the work can be done outside of the regular work environment. When discussing suitability of unsuitability of positions for telecommuting, supervisors and managers should consider explaining to employees why the determinations were made. Providing a systematic rationale for the decision will promote understanding and may help limit employee dissatisfaction.

Related to hybrid telecommuting, due to the academic calendar, telecommuting may be a better option during some times of the year (e.g., summer) due to the variation of the presence of students on campus.

Step 2: Determine the Suitability of Specific Employees Interested in Telecommuting

Once it has been determined that all or some of the role responsibilities can be performed outside of the regular work environment, it must be identified if the employee in this role is

compatible to telecommuting. This must be considered on a case-by-case basis for current employees and must also be considered when interviewing candidates for vacancies requiring telecommuting as a condition of employment.

The telecommuting/remote work approval or denial determination is made by the employee's supervisor, Division head, and Human Resources. This determination should be made from the employee's submitted telecommuting request based upon the supervisor's assessment of their suitability for remote work. If the employee feels that they need a reasonable accommodation which may include telecommuting as an option, supervisors are encouraged to work with their HRP, and the Leave and Worker's Compensation Specialist, to explore options and confirm applicability.

The following questions constitute a suitability tool that can be used to support decision-making and may aid in explaining the reasons for or against approving an employee's telecommuting agreement:

Telecommuting Suitability Tool

- **Is the job exempt or non-exempt according to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)?**

    Irrespective of where an employee is working, there is a certain degree of schedule flexibility inherent in positions with titles designated FLSA-exempt. Employees who are not FLSA-exempt must report actual hours worked.

- **If the job is non-exempt and subject to the FLSA overtime requirements, can work hours be accurately determined if the employee is telecommuting?**

    Employees may not work overtime or additional hours that generate night or weekend differentials, without receiving supervisor approval in advance of the overtime work to be performed. Night and weekend differentials are not available when a telecommuting employee chooses to shift their work hours into a night or weekend period for the employee's benefit or convenience.

- **When considering the position description (PD), how many (or what percentage) of the responsibilities are "portable?"**

    If overall responsibilities do not support a 100% telecommuting agreement, can a partial or hybrid arrangement be considered?

- **Could the daily essential duties of a PD be rearranged to support a telecommuting request?**

    Alternatively, can two PDs be adjusted by replacing tasks requiring on-campus work with portable task of another employee seeking to operate solely on-campus?

- **Considering the purpose of the position and the nature of the work performed in the PD, are they primarily information-based or service-based?**

Information-based positions requiring infrequent in-person (versus virtual or telephonic) contact between the employee and those served may warrant a telecommuting agreement.

- **Do the essential functions of the PD require extensive face-to-face contact with supervisors, other employees, or (especially) students that can only be accomplished on campus?**

  A *Custodial Supervisor* responsible for the cleaning work   of Custodian staff will be required to perform this in-person. The frequency and duration of these essential functions may inform whether a telecommuting agreement is possible.

- **Do the essential functions of the PD require access to equipment, tools, materials or files that can only be accessed on campus?**

  Digital photo production and editing is likely easier to perform remotely versus traditional film developing, enlarging, and printing. Conversely, pick-up and delivery of catered foods would likely be difficult without dedicated university vehicles.

- **Do the essential functions of the PD require the work to be performed on campus?**

  An *Environmental Health Specialist* responsible for testing and analyzing the atmosphere of chemistry laboratories must do so on campus. *Custodians* responsible for the cleanliness and disinfection of university buildings must be on campus to perform these tasks.

- **Do security concerns require the essential responsibilities to be conducted on campus?**

  Are there strategies, tools or procedures available that can mitigate security risks such as Virtual Private Networks or enhanced firewall protections for university-owned computers?

- **Does the nature of the work require the employee to be self-directed and resolve routine problems independently?**

  How often and in what manner must the employee seek the assistance or input from colleagues or other stakeholders? How will sharing of information/learning be accomplished if remote work is approved?

- **Do employees requesting approval of a telecommuting agreement have a complete understanding of the job and the performance expectations?**

  Employees serving a probation period, or a period of evaluation may benefit from completing the initial period of employment while on campus.

- **Do employees seeking approval of telecommuting agreements demonstrate dependability, organizational skills, and the ability to meet deadlines?**

  Consider the performance of employee over the previous 12 months. The employee actions during the mandatory remote work directive resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic may inform and predict future performance.

- **Have employees seeking approval of telecommuting agreements met or exceeded performance standards in previous evaluative periods?**

  Again, consider the performance of employee over the previous 12 months.

- **Can the performance or work output of a telecommuting employee be accurately measured?**

  Previously used assessment tools or procedures may not be applicable and may need to be modified. Consideration should be given to leveraging the suggestions of employees seeking to telecommute.

- **How will employees be given fair and equitable consideration without favoritism?**

  Denial of a telecommuting request of a poorly performing employee, if remote supervision is deemed insufficient, should not be considered favoritism or unfair. Furthermore, the denial of a telecommuting request for employees whose job responsibilities cannot be adequately performed from home should also not be considered favoritism.

3. **Summary and Approval Information**

   Requests to work remotely must be carefully reviewed before approving. All approved agreements will not be automatically extended and will require annual review and approval. In general, higher levels of scrutiny and justification are required for approval of fully remote work.

   In most cases, the approval of a telecommuting agreement does not preclude the university from requiring that an employee be on site on a regular basis. Most employees may be expected to be onsite at least two days a week. This may vary throughout the school year and may also vary based on the need of the position.

   Telecommuting approvals shall be transacted as follows:

   1. The employee may request the telecommuting arrangement, or the supervisor.

   2. The Supervisor shall discuss the desire to have the employee telecommute with Human Resources to seek informal approval.

3. Once there has been informal approval from Human Resources, the supervisor should discuss the matter with their division head.

4. The employee must route for formal approval, the UW System Telecommuting form.

5. Once the email approvals have been granted, the data will appear in the Supervisor's Dashboard in Tableau.

6. The supervisor and employee are responsible for the regular review of the approved agreement.

Telecommuting is not an employee "right" or benefit. Participation in telecommuting is voluntary in nature and employees are not required to participate as a condition of employment.[1] The existence of a telecommuting agreement in no way alters an individual's employment relationship with UWL or alters the employee's obligation to observe all applicable rules, policies, and procedures. All existing terms and conditions of employment including, but not limited to, the position description, performance expectations, hourly wage/salary, benefits, leave allocation, and overtime reporting requirements remain the same as if the employee was working on campus.

1 *Exceptions include appointments for which telecommuting is integral to the successful performance of the position*

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4. **Telecommuting Suitability Checklist**

Yes	No	Question
		Employee has submitted a Telecommuting Agreement via UWS Workflow
		Can the core duties and responsibilities of the employee be performed remotely?
		Will departmental/unit operational needs be met if the employee is approved to work remotely?
		Will the needs of stakeholders, especially students, be met if remote work request is approved?
		Will the employee be able to establish, maintain, and strengthen interpersonal/collegial relationships if remote work is approved?

		Is it possible (or provisions can be made) to ensure timely and effective sharing of information/learning if remote work is approved?
		Does the employee have access to the necessary equipment and technology to ensure successful remote work?
		Has the employee consistently demonstrated an ability to accept the responsibility of working in a remote location?
		Has the employee seeking the remote agreement consistently met or exceeded performance expectations?
		Will the supervisor be able to monitor and measure efficient and effective performance if the employee is approved for remote work?
		Does the proposed work schedule of the employee seeking approval for remote work align with the needs of the department/unit?
		Has a plan or schedule for regular "check-ins" been established or has the supervisor identified a method to ensure regular communication with the telecommuting employee during the established work schedule?
		Has the supervisor identified a method to ensure effective participation in team meetings if the employee is approved for remote work?
		Considering similar staff performing similar functions, has the employee being given fair and equitable consideration under the above criteria, without discrimination or favoritism?

The preponderance of boxes checked "Yes" will likely indicate support for approval of a telecommuting agreement.

5. Additional Resources

- UW System Administrative Policy 1228: Telecommuting

- UW System Telecommuting Approval Form: Entry and Approval Tip Sheet
- UW System Manager Guide to Telecommuting
- UWL Telecommuting Resources