

Design the Right Telework Program for Your Workplace

An Employer's Guide to
Formalizing Telework
Arrangements



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Why Telework?

Offering flexibility in the workplace benefits both your business and your employees. As an employer in Maryland, incentives are available to make it easier to offer telework options to your employees.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

Telework is a successful tool used by employers to reduce operational and real estate costs, provide flexibility and expand recruitment and retention efforts. According to Global Workplace Analytics the leading authority on the impact of telework,

- Nearly 60% of employers indicate cost savings are a significant benefit to telework, with companies like IBM slashing real estate costs by as much as \$50 million.
- Companies that implemented a telework program experienced a 63% reduction in unscheduled absences.
- 95% of companies indicate that telework has a high impact on employee retention.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Employees want more flexible work options—largely due to the impact on their commutes. Global Workplace Analytics finds that two-thirds of people want to work from home.
- Two-thirds of employees say they would leave their current company for an easier commute.
- A study by Robert Half found that nearly one in four employees quit their jobs because of a bad commute.
- 73% of employees feel their employers should help them reduce their commute costs.

INCENTIVES FOR BUSINESSES OFFERING TELEWORK

Maryland-based companies that offer subsidies to cover employees' telework-related expenses, including internet access, computer equipment, telephone service, co-working memberships, or job-related software can receive the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit. The tax credit allows employers to claim 50% of the subsidy amount provided to employees, up to a maximum of \$100 per employee per month.

Example:



X



=

\$1,500
TAX CREDIT

ABC Company provides employees with a signed telework agreement who telework two or more days per week with a \$60 monthly subsidy to use on telework-related expenses or improvements.

There are 50 people participating in the telework program.

The company applies for the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit and receives \$30 per participant, or \$1,500 total.

Types of Policies and Programs

Telework is simply the practice of working from home or another remote location. Employers create internal policies that outline what telework means for their organization and its employees. Below are common types of telework programs and how they may be defined.



Determine the Right Program for Your Company

For companies new to telework or those that have faced challenges with it in the past, determining the right program for your organization may feel daunting. Developing or updating a telework program requires thoughtful planning and input from key stakeholders. Partnering with Frederick County Employer Connection or a consultant can help you design a program that's right for your workplace. Below are key elements to help your company start off on the right path.

WORKFORCE CONSIDERATIONS

Analyze your existing workforce to determine which positions are suited for telework, how many employees could participate in the program, and the impact on your operations.

Positions suitable for telework generally include those that do not require:

- The employee to be physically present daily to complete job functions.
- Continuous on-the-job training or close supervision that necessitates in-person presence.
- Face-to-face contact with employees, supervisors, customers, or the public at a worksite that cannot otherwise be achieved.
- A level of customer service that cannot be maintained at an alternative worksite.
- Daily access to materials or networks that cannot be provided off-site.



Examples of roles that may be appropriate for telework, include positions focused on **research, data analysis, writing or editing, and phone calls or virtual meetings.**



In contrast, roles such as **front desk concierges, laboratory workers, or maintenance staff** are less compatible with telework due to their responsibilities.

Identifying which job positions aren't currently eligible for telework can help you find ways to expand technology use and increase the number of eligible employees. This assessment can also help guide decisions about offering remote options for certain positions even if hybrid or recurring telework isn't an option. Some roles may still benefit from occasional, unscheduled telework or other flexible arrangements.

SURVEYS

To better understand whether telework can benefit your employees and its potential impact, conduct an employee survey to help you fill in missing gaps and support appropriate planning and policy decisions.

A survey can help you identify:

- If an employee's job duties would prohibit them from teleworking (in a scenario where this information is not otherwise available).
- Share of employees interested in teleworking.
- Desired frequency of teleworking and preferred telework days.
- Employee technology needs to support telework.
- Potential sustainability, retention or other impact of teleworking.
- Other feedback important to the planning process.

SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- Do you have a dedicated workspace at home? (Yes/No)
- Do you have the necessary equipment and resources to work effectively from home? (Yes/No)
- What technology is important to complete your job functions? (Dropdown list)
- Are there distractions or obligations that would make working from home difficult? (Scale – no distractions to significant distractions)
- What is your ideal balance between in-office work and telework? (Scale – 0% to 100%)

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Engaging stakeholders throughout the development of a telework program is essential and may vary at each organization or at project stages. While Human Resources typically leads the development process, key stakeholders may include representatives from:

- **Company leadership:** Help set the goal or objective of the telework program and ensure the program aligns with the company's priorities.
- **Facilities or Operations:** Involved in space planning, determining any parking and real estate impacts or improvements, operational impacts, and hardware purchases or needs.
- **Information Technology (IT):** Identify network impacts and technology needed, software or hardware purchases or improvements, maintain related inventory lists, and train staff on software and security.
- **Legal Counsel:** Telework interacts with multiple employment laws so it's a good idea to involve counsel to review policy documentation or situations.
- **Managers:** Identify eligible employees, determine impacts of the program to existing team operations and functions, and participate in training to understand how the telework policy should be carried out.

Smaller focus groups with key employees or managers can help identify potential barriers, gather feedback, and assess the impacts of telework which is useful to solve challenges and ensure alignment across the organization.

Formalize Your Policy

A formalized telework policy ensures that there is appropriate documentation to help managers and employees understand the boundaries of the program and establishes standards for eligibility, scheduling, technology and other areas.

WHAT MAKES A FORMAL TELEWORK POLICY?

A formal telework policy, typically included in an organization's handbook, outlines specific standards, processes and expectations. It provides structured documentation to ensure consistency and clarity across the organization. An informal policy may not be documented and rely on verbal agreements or individual/team discussions to define standards and norms.

A formal telework program typically includes the following features:

- Written policy in an employee handbook.
- Individual telework agreement forms.
- Supplementary manager and/or employee forms or checklists, such as:
 - Telework eligibility determination forms
 - Employee software or hardware log or checklist
 - Training material

A sample policy is included on page 8 of this guide which can be adapted to fit your company's needs. For further resources and support to develop or enhance your organization's telework policy, contact Frederick County Employer Connection.

Sample Telework Policy

The sample telework policy was amended from The Society for Human Resources Management's sample Telecommuting Policy and Procedure documentation. Policies should be reviewed by legal counsel before use and implementation.

OBJECTIVE

[Company Name] considers telework to be a viable, flexible work option when both the employee and the job are suited to such an arrangement. Telework may be appropriate for some employees and jobs but not for others. Telework is a voluntary program for employees who meet the eligibility criteria, and it in no way changes the terms and conditions of an employee's employment with [Company Name].

PROCEDURES

Telework is defined as working at the [Company Name]'s approved alternative workplace for a partial or full workday. [Company name] recognizes two types of telework arrangements:

- Scheduled, recurring telework
- Employee and Supervisor determine the best recurring telework schedule with consideration to position and organization's needs.
- Ad hoc telework
- Supervisor may permit employee to telework on an as-needed basis. An agreement is necessary for documentation and to track telework data.

Any teleworking arrangement made will be on a trial basis for the first [trial period] and may be discontinued at will and at any time at the request of either the employee or the organization.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals requesting formal teleworking arrangements must be employed with [Company Name] for a minimum of [time requirement] of continuous, regular employment and must have a satisfactory performance record. Additionally, the supervisor and [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.] will consider the following factors when determining eligibility to participate in the telework program.

- The employee's ability to complete and accomplish his/her workload and required contributions to the company from a workplace other than the official worksite
- The impact on the normal operations and workflow of [Company Name] if a telework agreement is approved and implemented
- The employee's past and present work performance, current assignments, workload, and goals

Before entering into any telework agreement, the employee, manager, and [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.] will evaluate the suitability of such an arrangement, reviewing the following areas:

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- Job responsibilities: The employee and manager will discuss the job responsibilities and determine if the job is appropriate for a teleworking arrangement.
- Employee suitability: The employee and manager will assess the needs and work habits of the employee, compared to traits customarily recognized as appropriate for successful teleworkers.
- Equipment needs, workspace design, scheduling issues: The employee and manager will review the physical workspace needs and the appropriate location for the telework.
- Tax and other legal implications: The employee must determine any tax or legal implications under IRS, state and local government laws, and/or restrictions of working out of a home-based office. Responsibility for fulfilling all obligations in this area rests solely with the employee.

If the employee and manager agree, and the [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.] concurs, a telework agreement will be prepared and signed by all parties, and a [trial duration] trial period will commence.

Evaluation of the teleworking employee's performance during the trial period will include regular communication between the employee and the manager to discuss work progress and problems. At the end of the trial period, the employee and manager will complete an evaluation of the arrangement and make recommendations for continuance or modifications.

If the telework arrangement extends beyond the trial period, an approved telework agreement lasting no more than [max length of agreement] will be signed by the employee and supervisor, and authorized by the [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.]. The agreement will be reviewed and renewed at the end of each agreement period following this procedure.

ALTERNATIVE WORKSITE

The employee and [Company Name] agree that the official duty station is: [Company Name and Address]

The alternative worksite shall only be the location cited in the approved telework agreement, which should include the street, city, state, and postal zip code.

The basis for all pay, leave accrual, and point from where travel per diem and allowable travel expenses will be calculated is the employee's official duty station.

EQUIPMENT

On a case-by-case basis, [Company Name] will determine, with information supplied by the employee and the supervisor, the appropriate equipment needs (including hardware, software, modems, phone and data lines and other office equipment) for each teleworking arrangement. Equipment supplied by the organization will be maintained by the organization. Equipment supplied by the employee, if deemed appropriate by the organization, will be maintained by the employee. [Company Name] accepts no responsibility for damage or repairs to employee-owned equipment. [Company Name] reserves the right to make determinations as to appropriate equipment, subject to change at any time. Equipment supplied by the organization is to be used for business purposes only.

The teleworking employee must sign an inventory of all [Company Name] property received and agree to take appropriate action to protect the items from damage or theft. Upon termination of employment, all company property will be returned to the company, unless other arrangements have been made.

DESIGN THE RIGHT TELEWORK PROGRAM FOR YOUR WORKPLACE

[Company Name] will supply the employee with appropriate office supplies (pens, paper, etc.) as deemed necessary. [Company Name] will also reimburse the employee for business-related expenses, such as long-distance phone calls and shipping costs, that are reasonably incurred in carrying out the employee's job.

[Company Name] will not be responsible for costs associated with the setup of the employee's home office, such as remodeling, furniture or lighting, nor for repairs or modifications to the home office space.

SECURITY

Consistent with the organization's expectations of information security for employees working at the office, teleworking employees will be expected to ensure the protection of proprietary company and customer information accessible from their home office. Steps include the use of locked file cabinets and desks, regular password maintenance, and any other measures appropriate for the job and the environment.

SAFETY

Employees are expected to maintain their home workspace in a safe manner, free from safety hazards. [Company Name] will provide each teleworking employee with a safety checklist that must be completed [frequency]. Injuries sustained by the employee in a home office location and in conjunction with his or her regular work duties are normally covered by the company's workers' compensation policy. Teleworking employees are responsible for notifying the employer of such injuries as soon as practicable. The employee is liable for any injuries sustained by visitors to his or her home worksite.

WORK SCHEDULE

Teleworking employees who are not exempt from the overtime requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act are still required to adhere to their beginning and ending work times, breaks, and meal periods. Employees must continue to accurately maintain all required time records. Hours worked in excess of those scheduled per day and per work-week require the advance approval of the employee's supervisor. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the immediate termination of the telework agreement.

By signing a telework agreement, the employee agrees to perform only his/her official job duties during the workday while at the approved alternative worksite. The employee agrees not to conduct personal business during regularly scheduled work hours while at the approved alternative worksite. Teleworking is not designed to be a replacement for appropriate childcare. Although an individual employee's schedule may be modified to accommodate childcare needs, the focus of the arrangement must remain on job performance and meeting business demands. Employees entering into a telework agreement are encouraged to discuss expectations with family members prior to beginning a trial period.

CHANGES OR CANCELLATION

When an employee with an approved telework agreement desires a one-time change to his/her approved scheduled, recurring telework agreement, this change must be requested in advance and approved by the supervisor. Supervisors will consider eligibility factors when deciding on requested adjustments.

If a permanent change is required, either by the employee or by management, to an employee's approved telework agreement, the employee may be required to complete a new telework agreement. Eligibility will be re-determined by the supervisor and [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.] when deciding if a permanent change may be approved.

By entering a telework agreement, the employee understands that the supervisor or [authorizing body: CEO, Executive Director, HR, etc.] may cancel an approved telework arrangement at any time and instruct the employee to resume work at the official duty station. Every effort will be made to provide [XX days/weeks] notice of such change to accommodate commuting, childcare and other issues that may arise from the cancellation of a telework arrangement. However, there may be instances when no notice is possible.

By entering a telework agreement, the employee understands that he/she may cancel an approved telework arrangement and resume work at the official duty station, provided that advance notice is given to the supervisor.

ADMINISTRATIVE OR PERSONNEL ACTIONS

Nothing in an approved telework agreement precludes [Company Name] from taking appropriate disciplinary or administrative action against an employee who fails to comply with the provisions of the telework agreement or other workplace policies and procedures.

AD HOC REQUESTS

An employee with an approved ad hoc telework agreement may telework due to inclement weather, unscheduled/unplanned office closures, priority/urgent work assignments, or other situation as discussed with supervisor. An employee must communicate a request for an ad hoc telework day [XX hours/days] in advance of his/her scheduled workday. Supervisors may approve or deny an employee's request for an ad hoc telework day on a case-by-case basis.

OTHER ARRANGEMENTS

Other short-term or long-term telework arrangements not covered under this policy may be made for employees as a reasonable accommodation or for employees on family or medical leave to the extent practical for the employee and the organization and with the consent of the employee's health care provider, if appropriate.

Resources for Your Employees

Employees transitioning into a company's new telework policy may need additional support to succeed, understand program eligibility and stay connected. This guide contains key resources designed to help your team stay productive while working off-site:



Am I Eligible? Telework Checklist (page 13):

Help employees determine if their role is eligible for telework so they can see the policy in practice and prepare questions before talking to their manager.



Telework Best Practices

(page 14):

Share this handout during training or with your company's telework announcement to set staff up for success in a remote work environment.



Make the Most of Telework

(page 15):

This resource is useful for staff who feel distracted or disconnected while teleworking to help them feel re-energized.

Am I Eligible?

TELEWORK CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYEES

[Company]’s Telework Policy, outlined on Page [Page #] of the Employee Handbook, allows for flexible work arrangements depending on your job function and performance. The checklist below is a helpful starting point to determine if your role is eligible for telework. However, this is not a replacement for a telework agreement and your supervisor must confirm your eligibility. For questions about your eligibility, please contact your direct supervisor.

Question	✓
Can my job’s tasks and functions be completed at a location other than my assigned worksite at least one or more days of the week?	
Can I access equipment, tools, software, networks or materials necessary to complete my job from home or an alternative worksite?	
Can my daily tasks and functions be completed without face-to-face interaction and using other technology when necessary?	
Can I work from home or an alternative worksite without negatively impacting the level of service that is provided to our customers?	
Has my performance been satisfactory based on recent performance reviews?	
Am I in good standing with my employer, without any formal disciplinary action or reprimand within the past twelve months?	

If all of the above questions receive a checkmark, your position may be eligible for the company’s telework program.

In addition to the above criteria, the following can also help you understand your suitability for telework. While these may not impact eligibility, thinking about how you will address or improve these skills can support your success while teleworking.

Question	✓
Do I demonstrate strong organizational skills?	
Do I consistently manage my time effectively?	
Am I able to work independently with minimal supervision on a regular basis?	
Do I feel comfortable using technology and troubleshooting related issues?	
Am I able to communicate effectively both in writing and verbally when not face-to-face?	
Do I have a supportive environment to work at home free of distractions?	
Am I able to reliably maintain my work hours from another location?	



**Change out of
your PJs**
Don't forget
to dress
for success!



**Schedule out
your day**
What's on your
calendar for
today?



**Stick to
your routine**

Stick to your
working hours
and enjoy
your evening
away from
your computer.

Best Practices for a Productive Telework Day



**Unplug for
Lunch**

Take a break
from your
computer and
enjoy a meal,
get fresh air
or refill your
coffee cup.



**Set
ground rules**

Let your roommate,
spouse, or even
your kids know
your working hours.

**Prep your
workspace**

Create a
designated
area that limits
clutter and
distractions.



MAKE THE MOST OF TELEWORK

If telework leaves you feeling isolated or distracted, take advantage of these resources and tips to boost motivation and create community.

RE-ENERGIZE YOUR WORKSPACE:

Update your workspace to reduce the potential for clutter, discomfort or disruptions and to enhance motivation and creativity.

REACH OUT TO A COWORKER:

Just like popping into a team member's office, reach out to chat over coffee or catch up via video.



CHANGE YOUR LOCATION:

Visit a coffee shop or purchase a day pass to Cowork Frederick to feel more connected to others or step away from distractions at home.

TALK TO YOUR MANAGER:

If you feel like telework isn't right for you, have a discussion with your manager to determine potential solutions or explore other types of flexible work options that can benefit you.

TAKE A BREAK:

Overworking can lead to feeling disconnected or less focused. Be sure to take adequate breaks and stick to your schedule, leaving time for hobbies, relaxation and time with loved ones.