

Tips for Creating a Telework Policy



The following guide provides general concepts, definitions and ideas that can help employers create a policy that ensures their employees understand what will be expected from them as part of their telework program.

Purpose

Teleworking, the practice of working at home or remotely instead of in the office, is a work alternative offered to some employees to help them balance the demands of their work and personal lives and is a workplace strategy - not an employee right.

An employer should determine whether an employee's compensation, benefits, work status, and work responsibilities will change due to participation in the telework program and to what extent teleworking employees are expected to comply with all organizational rules, policies, and procedures.

Eligibility

A telework policy may include eligibility requirements for employees to participate in the telework program. For example, candidates for teleworking might include those with a history of satisfactory or better job performance ratings and no record of performance or conduct issues. The policy may also need to address which individuals are responsible for making the decision to allow an employee to telework, such as a supervisor and Human Resources.

A policy could also set forth the criteria used to select employees to participate in the telework program, such as:

- Employee responsibilities
- Need for, and nature of, interaction with other staff and external clients
- Need for specialized equipment
- Availability of other qualified employees on site
- Employee job performance

A policy could set forth the characteristics of a successful teleworker, such as the ability to work independently and demonstrate productivity and time management with reliance on job resources that are easily transportable or available electronically. Further, a policy may need to address whether eligibility and suitability will vary among departments and business units, including whether some departments may require that employees remain onsite for the benefit of organization.

The policy could also address whether teleworking is intended to be used as an alternative to child or elder care and dependent care. Arrangements for dependent care may still be required.

Schedules and Hours

A telework policy may need to address schedules and hours for employees working remotely. For example, telework hours may be different from office work hours, as determined by teleworkers and their employer. Additionally, a policy might address the number of days the teleworker will spend working from and working in his/her office on the employer's office premises as well as the amount of time the teleworker is expected to work per day or per pay period.

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Overtime hours, schedule deviations, and absences may also need to be addressed in a telework policy as well as information regarding teleworkers' responsibility for keeping and submitting records of work hours. A policy could address the ability of supervisors to require a teleworker to return to the office on a regularly scheduled telework day, if needed.

Workspace

A policy may need to address workspace requirements for teleworkers, including appropriate home/remote office conditions such as ergonomics, equipment, workspace, noise, interruptions, adequate work area, lighting, telephone service, reliability of internet connection, power, and temperature control. Additional requirements may vary, depending on the nature of the work and the equipment needed to perform the work.

In creating telework workspace requirements, an employer should consider the applicability of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety rules for the workplace including: smoke detector; working fire extinguisher; clear, unobstructed exits; removal of hazards that could cause falls; adequate electrical circuitry; and appropriate furniture.

A policy may also address insurance requirements for teleworking employees and whether increases in a teleworker's home utility costs are the responsibility of the employee. A policy may encourage teleworkers to consult their attorneys, tax advisors, or accountants regarding any legal or tax implications attendant to working at their home or alternative site.

Equipment and Supplies

A telework policy could detail the equipment and supplies needed to telework successfully. For example, teleworkers may be required to provide their own equipment or use company-owned equipment at their off-site workspace. The policy could also address the type of approval needed to use company equipment as well as conditions for use; for example, that the equipment will be used for company work only and its use by a teleworker at his/her off-site workspace will not impede the work of employees working at the office.

The policy could also address the office supplies needed to telework and whether such supplies will be provided by employer; when those supplies may be obtained; whether out-of-pocket expenses for supplies will be reimbursed by the employer; whether teleworkers maintain responsibility for supplies, equipment, and/or materials provided by the company; and conditions of use.

Employee Access and Availability

A policy may address the expectations of availability of teleworkers, such as by phone or email, during scheduled hours and meal and break period(s).

Security

A policy may need to include the requirements for teleworkers to secure proprietary electronic and physical information to prevent unauthorized access and ensure the integrity and confidentiality of proprietary information. This could include, for example, safety inspections, equipment installation, retrieval of property, and hardware and software security.

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Application Process

A policy could also establish a formal application process for employees to telework that includes, for example, a formal written request to telework, completion of a Teleworker Selection Survey, and submission of information concerning job responsibilities, proposed teleworking schedule, types of work tasks to be performed at the off-site workspace, and description of the off-site workspace/equipment required. An application process could also include, if appropriate, a signed Telework Agreement with the employee. A telework arrangement could also potentially be on a trial basis for a limited period of time.

Evaluation

A policy may need to address requirements to participate in studies, surveys, training, inquiries, reports, and analyses relating to a company's telework program.