

Procedure: **Telecommuting/Telework**

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References: HRS Policies

Telecommuting or Telework, the practice of working from home or another work site instead of physically traveling to the office, is a work alternative that the University offers to employees when it would benefit both the University and the employee. Telecommuting is not a formal, universal employee benefit; rather it is an alternative method of meeting the needs of the University and the employee. The University has the right to refuse to make telecommuting available to an employee and to terminate a telecommuting arrangement at any time. Employees are not required to telecommute.

A. PURPOSE

Telecommuting may serve to reduce absenteeism, improve employee recruitment and retention, improve productivity, and provide employees with greater flexibility in meeting their job and family needs. In addition, the reduced travel could provide direct air quality, transportation, and energy conservation benefits.

B. ELIGIBILITY

Not all jobs are suited for telecommuting. To assess whether telecommuting would fit the job, the supervisor and employee need to address the following issues:

- Does the position have clearly defined tasks?
- Can results and productivity be effectively measured with limited supervisory observation?
- Can work products and tasks be completed without undue hardship on co-workers and others?
- Does the technology currently available permit telecommuting as an option?

The decision to allow an employee to telecommute will be made by the employee's supervisor and Dean/Director. Supervisors must take into account the employee's current areas of responsibility, need for and nature of interaction with co-workers and others, and appropriate measures of performance. Eligibility and suitability of employees to participate in telecommuting will vary among departments, offices, and work units, depending on the function and program responsibilities of the office and employee.

C. WORK SCHEDULE/HOURS

A regular telecommuting schedule, including specific days and hours, should be established in writing and approved by the supervisor. The amount of time the employee is expected to work per day or per pay period will not change due to participation in the telecommuting program.

The employee will work at home, or at an alternate work site mutually agreed to by the employee and supervisor, during the hours agreed upon by the employee and supervisor. Changes to this schedule will be reviewed and approved in advance by the employee's supervisor.

The supervisor retains the right to require a telecommuting employee to return to the office on a regularly scheduled telecommuting day. If an employee is frequently required to return to the office during regularly scheduled telecommuting days, the supervisor may re-evaluate the compatibility of the employee's position and job responsibilities with telecommuting.

D. WORK STANDARDS/PERFORMANCE

The conditions of employment and the work performance standards for telecommuters remain the same as for non-telecommuting employees.

The employee will meet with his or her supervisor to receive assignments and to review completed work as requested, necessary, or appropriate. The employee will complete assigned work, according to work procedures and expectations established by the supervisor.

E. EMPLOYEE ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

Telecommuting employees must be available by telephone during scheduled work hours.

Telecommuting employees are required to modify their voice mail announcement to indicate that they may be reached at an alternative number or that the employee will be regularly checking for messages. Employees are required to frequently check for messages during the day. Telecommuters must notify the office if they leave their telecommuting location during work hours.

F. WORK SPACE

Staff or Temporary employees may telework from home or an alternate work site within the state of Montana only (MT Code 2-18-101). The employee's off-site workspace will be considered an extension of the University's workspace. Before participating in a telecommuting agreement, the employee must provide a written description of the intended workspace. The workspace must provide adequate work area, light, telephone service, power, and temperature control. The employee must maintain the workspace in a safe condition, free from hazards and other dangers to the employee and equipment.

As part of the monitoring process for the telecommuting program, the employee must agree that the University may make on-site visits to the remote work location for the purpose of determining that the site is safe and free from hazards, and to maintain, repair, inspect, or retrieve University-owned equipment, software, data, or supplies. The supervisor should visit the proposed alternative work location to ensure the area is in a safe condition and is free from hazards and other dangers to the employee and/or equipment.

The University will not be responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, or any other incidental costs (e.g., utilities) associated with use of the employee's residence or other non-University location. Homeowners' insurance and any changes in rates or coverage are the sole responsibility of the employee.

G. EQUIPMENT/EXPENSES

Office equipment needed to participate in telecommuting may vary by employee and task. The University will not purchase or reimburse a telecommuting employee for equipment necessary to function in a telecommuting work environment. Employees may use their own equipment (e.g., personal computer, modem, answering machine, fax machine, etc.) provided the University incurs no cost. Repair and maintenance of employee-owned equipment is the responsibility of the employee.

Employees may use University-owned equipment and/or supplies, with prior supervisory approval, provided only the authorized employee will use the equipment for work-related purposes and supplies. Employees who use University equipment at home must agree to protect such equipment from loss or damage.

Telecommuting employees may be reimbursed for long distance telephone calls made from the employee's personal telephone, provided appropriate documentation is submitted for reimbursement.

H. COMPENSATION/BENEFITS

The employee's compensation, benefits, work status, and work responsibilities will not change due to participation in the telecommuting program.

Employees who work overtime with advance approval, or at the request of his or her supervisor, will be compensated in accordance with applicable laws, collective bargaining agreement, and University policy. Failure to obtain prior approval for overtime work may result in removal from telecommuting and/or other appropriate action. Supervisory approval must be obtained prior to taking leave.

I. LIABILITY

The University will be liable for job-related accidents that occur in the employee's off-site workspace during the employee's established working hours. The University assumes no liability for injuries occurring in the employee's off-site workspace outside the agreed-upon work hours. The University will not be liable for injury to others in the employee's home or other off-site location during working hours.

In the case of an injury while working at off-site, the employee will immediately (as circumstances permit) report the injury to his or her supervisor and obtain appropriate medical treatment. The supervisor, or designee, will investigate all accident and injury reports immediately following notification.

J. CONFIDENTIALITY/SECURITY

To insure hardware and software security prior to installation, the supervisor must approve all software used for telecommuting. Restricted-access materials cannot be taken out of the office or accessed through the computer unless approved in advance by the supervisor.

The employee must follow department-approved data security procedures at the alternate work site to protect the department or University records from unauthorized disclosure or damage, and comply with the privacy requirements set forth in state law and University policy.

K. APPLICATION PROCESS

Employees wishing to telecommute must discuss the possibility with their supervisor. If both parties agree to telecommuting, the Telecommuter's Assignment form must be completed. This form contains information concerning current responsibilities, the proposed telecommuting schedule, the types of work tasks and activities to be performed at the off-site workspace, and a description of the off-site workspace and appropriate equipment, including any personal computer hardware and software.

Once the Telecommuter's Assignment form has been completed and signed by both the employee and the supervisor, both parties must sign the Telecommuting Agreement prior to beginning the telecommuting program. This agreement specifies the terms and conditions. The agreement must be approved by the appropriate Dean or Director and reviewed by HRS prior to implementation.