Making Your Own Telecommuting Agreement

Setting clear expectations is key to maintaining accountability while working from home. Use this guide to start a conversation in your own office about how you and your team can make work from home work better for everyone involved.

****Make sure to have your finished agreement reviewed by your Human Resources office to ensure legality and compliance with your university's policies.****

Step 1: Establish a purpose and define what telecommuting means in your unit. You can use the questions below as a guide:

- Why should telecommuting be an option in your office? For example, what are the benefits to staff, students and the community?
- How do you define telecommuting in your office? Is this going to be an option one day a week, every day until further notice, or some combination based on the needs of the office? Will you refer to it as telecommuting, work from home, or something else?

Step 2: Define eligibility rules. Who is allowed to telecommute?

- Will employees need to have worked in their position for a certain amount of time prior to becoming eligible to telecommute?
- If your unit uses Performance Evals, will low scores preclude someone from participating?
- Will front desk or other support staff be allowed to telecommute?
- Will eligibility be reviewed (annually, bi-annually, never?) to make sure employees are still in compliance and that the needs of the unit are still being met?

Step 3: Define performance characteristics that will be required in order to work from home. These will be important to maintaining accountability, so think about expectations you want to hold yourself, your co-workers, and your team to.

- What characteristics do you expect the team to demonstrate? For example:
    - Being on time and prepared for shift and all virtual meetings (how will tardiness or absenteeism be handled?) How will employees report hours worked outside their shift?
    - Maintaining a consistent and reliable work ethic (including remaining on task and logged on during entire shift) and abiding by all university and department policies, procedures, and standards of conduct
    - Able to demonstrate current work requirements can be performed at home without adversely impacting quality, productivity, and the needs of the University.
- How will you measure productivity?
    - How fast should the team be replying to emails (from both students and colleagues)?
    - Do they need to have a certain number of appointment times open to see students each day?

Step 4: Define infrastructure requirements. What are the basic things you will need access to at home in order to do your job? Some examples:

- Reliable high speed internet
    - What is the backup plan if the internet goes out?
- A cell phone with uninterrupted service and full charge.
    - What will happen if an employee cannot be reached during work hours?
- A laptop or desktop computer with access to all software and resources needed to perform job duties and that is in kept secured and in compliance with IT policies
- Will the university provide stipends or reimbursements for personal belongings or utilities used for telecommuting (such as cell phone, internet, office furniture, items needed to maintain an ergonomic environment)?
- Will support be provided to ensure staff are working in an ergonomic environment at home?
- What will be the protocol for reporting work-related injuries that happen at home?

Step 5: Define environment requirements.

- How will you define acceptable environmental distractions from unacceptable ones? For example:
    - Is it okay if your dog barks once in a while? Or is the expectation that you take your dog to doggy day care if they are going to be noisy?
    - Is it okay to work at home if it's possible that your kids could interrupt you during your shift? Or do you need to have child care planned at all times during your shift?
    - Is the neighbor's leaf blower every morning at 9 AM an issue?
- Do employees need to provide their home address in the agreement? If they are working from somewhere other than home one day, do they need to gain permission from their supervisor?
- How will you monitor and ensure the security of student data while at home? Will you outline a plan for potential FERPA violations? Or is this the responsibility of the advisor to uphold?

Step 6: Determine how employees who meet all eligibility requirements should request to work from home.

- Will the telecommuting agreement be made accessible for all who wish to fill it out? Do they need to gain approval from their supervisor first before submitting the request? What will the turnaround time be for getting an answer?
- Does the supervisor have the right to deny a request to work from home even if the employee claims they meet the criteria? If so, when can that employee request permission again?
- Where will signed/approved telecommuting agreement forms be stored?
- Will updates, changes or exceptions to the telecommuting agreement be allowed?

Other considerations:

- How will calling out sick be handled when employees are working from home?
- Should a clause be included that explains that the university can terminate the telecommuting agreement at any time?
- Do you need a clause stating that employees may be required to come to the office on a day they originally planned to telecommute to support the needs of the office (such as during peak advising?)
- Your legal or HR department will likely have their own additions and edits, so be sure to keep them informed and get their approval before utilizing your new telecommuting agreement.