

Wheaton College

Telecommuting Guidelines and Considerations

Guidelines

Wheaton College considers telecommuting to be an option in those limited situations where job responsibilities and an individual's characteristics are suited to accomplishing objectives in a location other than the primary place-of-business.

Telecommuting can be a short-term arrangement, such as working from home on a special project or while recuperating from an illness with a doctor's authorization, or a longer-term arrangement, such as an employee working at home for part of their regular work week, usually one or two days. All telecommuting arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis, focusing on the programmatic needs of Wheaton first.

Long-term telecommuting arrangements, i.e. those where the telecommuter is scheduled to telecommute for one or two days a week on a regular basis, are the focus of these guidelines, but many are also applicable to short-term arrangements.

Telecommuting is an alternative work arrangement, not a universal benefit. Telecommuting is not appropriate for all employees and all jobs. Telecommuting must benefit the telecommuter and the College. Telecommuting work arrangements are mutually agreed to by the telecommuter, supervisor(s), Division Officer, and the President as outlined in the Telecommuting Policy in the Employee Handbook. This approval process is initiated with a proposal, jointly written by the potential telecommuter and the supervisor(s). As stated in the policy, the arrangements may be terminated at any time.

Communication

The telecommuter is responsible for maintaining effective communication and workflow among coworkers, supervisor(s), and customers. The telecommuter, in conjunction with supervisor(s), will devise procedures for effective communication, including frequencies of email and telephone contact.

Work Space

When working at home, the telecommuter is responsible for establishing and maintaining an adequate workspace and for providing a work environment free of interruptions and distractions that would affect performance. The employee is responsible for providing adequate care for dependents while the employee is working.

Confidentiality and Security

It is important that work done at home be kept in a safe place, and that all computer data be secure. This may mean storing disks, reports, or data in locked files. Please remember that computer logins (including password information) and data transfers may be accessible to third parties. Information Technologies and Services can provide suggestions on securing your data through encryption.

Hours of Work

The telecommuter and his/her supervisor(s) will agree on the number of days of telecommuting allowed each week, the work schedule the employee will customarily maintain, and the manner and frequency of communication. The employee agrees to be accessible by phone or modem within a reasonable time period during the agreed-upon work schedule. The telecommuter is responsible for recording hours worked, vacation, sick, or other leave as the employee would do at Wheaton using the existing procedure.

Equipment and Expenses

Telecommuters are sometimes required to provide their own computer equipment, software, and peripherals. Second phone lines for telephone and computer-based communications may be required and may be the responsibility of the telecommuter. Whether Wheaton College or the telecommuter is responsible to provide these items is to be justified in the telecommuting proposal required in the policy.

Work-related long-distance telephone (voice) expenses incurred by the employee at home will be reimbursed by Wheaton. The employee must present an itemized copy of the telephone bill for reimbursement. Local Internet Service Providers (ISP's) are necessary for email and WWW functions and are provided by the College. To be reimbursed for any business expenses that may arise, the employee must seek program supervisor(s) approval before incurring them and have proper documentation to support the expenses. Travel to and from the College is not a reimbursable expense.

Standards

Telecommuters using their own computer equipment to perform their jobs from home must meet the hardware/software standards established by Wheaton and ensure that the equipment is ergonomically appropriate. The employee must follow all software licensing and copyright laws. College files and information should be kept in separate directories. Regular scans of the home computer by the employee for computer viruses need to be conducted to minimize virus-related problems.

Considerations

Telecommuting is a flexible work arrangement that allows an employee to work at home or on the road for part of their regular work week. It is an arrangement that may be appropriate for some employees and some jobs. It is not an entitlement.

Benefits of Telecommuting:

For the Employer:

- Employee morale may be improved.
- Productivity may be increased.
- Less office space may be required.
- Fewer commuters reduce parking requirements and support clean air/environment objectives.

For the Telecommuter:

- Greater ability to concentrate which can lead to increased productivity and creativity.
- Greater ability to work when most productive.
- Reduced stress from commuting problems, i.e. bad weather, parking, etc.
- Increased flexibility in dealing with home and health issues.

Negative Aspects of Telecommuting: For the Employer:

- Possible resentment of telecommuters by non-telecommuters.
- Decreased ability to directly observe/supervise telecommuter.
- Increased difficulty in scheduling team meetings.

For the Telecommuter:

- More difficult to communicate with supervisor(s), colleagues, and clientele.
- Need to establish work space at home.
- Greater difficulty in keeping work issues "at the office".

Jobs/Projects best suited to telecommuting are those that:

- Require independent work.
- Require little face-to-face interaction.
- Require concentration.
- Result in a specific, measurable work product.
- Can be monitored by the output.

Telecommuters and Managers

Individuals best suited to telecommuting arrangements are those who:

- Are self-motivated and flexible.
- Are able to work productively on their own.
- Are knowledgeable about job.
- Are dependable and trustworthy.
- Have an above-average performance record.
- Are organized.
- Have excellent communication skills.

Managers that work most effectively with telecommuters are those who:

- Learn how to manage by results or output rather than by time spent working.
- Are effective problem-solvers and facilitators.
- Encourage feedback and communication.
- Support telecommuting as a concept and work to make it successful.

Performance Characteristics

The following performance characteristics are usually associated with successful telecommuters and should be considered before entering into a telecommuting agreement:

- Ability to work alone effectively.
- Completes assignments independently and on time, meeting standards for quality.
- Communicates information fully, effectively, and timely with leadership, coworkers, support staff, and clientele.
- Sets appropriate priorities and changes priorities as needed.
- Demonstrates dependability and responsibility by following through on projects and work assignments.
- Operates computer and related equipment effectively and independently.

Specific responsibilities may require different or additional performance characteristics.

Job Characteristics

A job that is appropriate for telecommuting arrangements typically has the following characteristics:

- Job contains certain tasks that can best be completed during quiet, uninterrupted time.
- Clear objectives can be set, and tasks can be clearly defined.
- Ability to schedule work flow and allow work that can be done only at the main office to be completed on non-telecommuting days.
- Needs of colleagues and clientele can be satisfied from the alternate work place.
- Job is not primarily a position where office coverage is an important function.

Tips for Telecommuters and Supervisors

A telecommuter should:

- Make a periodic list of objectives with his/her program leader/supervisor(s), make sure they are well informed of the status of the telecommuter's work, and establish a method of periodic reporting.
- Make sure people at the primary office know how to reach the telecommuter.
- Insure that office staff know when it is appropriate to call at the telecommuting work site.
- Make sure primary office staff know how to handle phone calls.
- Check messages regularly.
- Take the initiative to stay in contact with colleagues.
- Be flexible and schedule telecommuting days around staff meetings and other job functions.
- Schedule work so he/she does not need assistance from others on telecommuting days.
- Inform family, friends, and neighbors and request their cooperation in minimizing interruptions.

A Supervisor of a telecommuter should:

- Make sure the job in question and the employee is suitable for telecommuting.
- Define goals and measurable objectives for the telecommuter and have a feedback mechanism.
- Establish expectations for work schedule, attendance at staff meetings, telephone contact, etc.
- Establish a communications and messaging plan.
- Consider the schedule of all staff while scheduling telecommuting days, in order to provide adequate coverage for the office.
- Insure non-telecommuters are not overburdened with work traditionally done by the telecommuter.