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Telework and Remote Work Suitability Guide*

*Adapted from the Telework Suitability Guide for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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Telework and Remote Work Suitability Guide

Telework/Remote Work for Virginia Tech Employees

During the COVID-19 pandemic and under the directive outlined under [Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 309](#), Virginia Tech moved to essential operations, transitioning around 80 percent of its workforce to remote work. As the university moved to modified operations on in preparation for the fall 2020 semester, university leaders, managers, and employees needed to determine what positions and employees are well suited for regular or occasional telework/remote work.

Recognizing that some work can only be done on-site, Virginia Tech supports the use of appropriate flexible and alternative work options for employees where remote work or telework is an option.

In order to meet the needs of Virginia Tech employees, while providing support for operations, it is recommended that employees be allowed to continue to work remotely, when their job responsibilities allow it. Supervisors are asked to be flexible with employees while maintaining clear performance expectations. Conversations between supervisors and employees should include:

- **Childcare/eldercare needs:** Flexibility with childcare and eldercare will be granted when working in an alternate location due to COVID-19.
- **Hours of work/schedule:** If an employee is actively caring for a child or family member, that time is not considered work time; appropriate leave should be used during those times.
- **Balance of presence in virtual and on-site meetings:** Supervisors should set clear expectations on how employees should participate in meetings. Zoom should continue to be used to provide all meeting attendees the opportunity to participate.
- **Expectations for focused, uninterrupted time for completing job responsibilities and attending meetings.** If an employee is unable to set boundaries for work time then the employee is expected to use leave.
- **Performance management expectations** and metrics of monitoring work performance.
- All other recommendations in Step 5, Tips for entering into a telework agreement, of this guide.

Benefits of Telework and Remote Work*

- Studies show that over 90 percent of candidates want an option to work remotely.
- The university can offer greater benefits in recruitment efforts, seeking alumni and diversity candidates who would be unwilling to consider Virginia Tech employment without a telecommuting option.
- Telework and remote work offers for better accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- It can reduce building costs for over-capacity workspaces with shared office space.
- Telework and remote work has proven to improve employee retention and job satisfaction.
- It increases work life balance and wellness for employees.
- 50 percent of the US workforce has a job that is conducive to at least part-time telecommuting.
- 35 percent of employees would change jobs for the opportunity to work remotely full-time.
- On average, an employer can save $11,000 per half-time tele-commuter per year.

*Benefits/Statistical Information pulled from: Global Workplace Analytics and Monster.com

Purpose

This document helps university leadership and managers in determining what positions and employees are well-suited for regular or occasional telework/remote work.

Virginia Tech supports the use of appropriate flexible and alternative work options for employees. Remote work and telework are terms used for describing university work occurring at a location other than the principle work site.

In compliance with the Code of Virginia, University Policy No. 4325 Alternate Work Site and Telework Policy outlines the requirements for supporting remote and telework arrangements for classified and university staff, and A/P faculty members. Please note, while the university policy states arrangements must be made for childcare, flexibility with childcare and eldercare will be granted when working in an alternate location due to COVID-19.

It is an accepted practice for Teaching and Research faculty (T/R faculty) to carry out their work with varied schedules on campus and at alternate locations, therefore a formal telework agreement will not be required for T/R faculty unless the normal work assignment is consistently at an alternate location (i.e. not the standard assigned office).

This *Telework and Remote Work Suitability Guide* is designed to determine how to use the university's approved telework agreement to support employee flexibility and department goals.

Telework is defined as an alternative workplace arrangement, which provides employees the opportunity to work at a place other than their regularly assigned work location.

Two critical steps must be followed to determine telework suitability:
- **Step 1:** Determine the suitability of **positions** based on **job duties and responsibilities.**
- **Step 2:** Determine the suitability of **employees** based on **past work performance.**

Step 1: Determining which positions are conducive to telework/remote work

A position can be considered suitable for telework/remote work if some or most of its responsibilities can be performed away from the regular work location. The change in work location should not impact productivity, customer service, operational efficiency, or team collaboration. The determination should be first based on the type of work, not just on employee performance. **The below list is merely a suggestion and is certainly not an exhaustive list**.

Typical roles may include, but are not limited to:	Typical tasks may include, but are not limited to:
- Accountant or Bookkeeper - Software Developer, Engineer or Computer Programmer - Graphic Designer or Illustrator - Secretarial or Administrative Assistant - Web Training or Web Design - Recruiter or Talent Acquisition - Data Entry or Database Administrator - Researcher - And more!	- Auditing - Analyzing Data - Budgeting - Calculating - Computer Programming - Data Analysis and Entry - Editing - Graphics work - Programming - Project Management - Recruiting/Sourcing - Research - Software Development - Writing

Each position should be considered individually, per the responsibilities of the role, to determine if the work can be done outside of the regular work environment.

IT ability and access to Wi-Fi networks also plays a large part in determining telework and remote work ability.

- Is the employee able to have access to the needed equipment to perform their job function?
- Do they have access to Wi-Fi to be able to complete their tasks, and communicate with their supervisor and team?
- Does the employee's core responsibilities require access to equipment, materials, and files that can only be accessed on site?
- Is the employee required to be on-site for face-to-face meetings with supervisors, other employees, students, or customers? Or can this contact be done electronically?

Remote Site Equipment:
Virginia Tech will still provide equipment in accordance with each employee's responsibilities. This usually will consist of a laptop computer, a monitor, mouse, keyboard, headset, and university phone number. Printers, copiers, scanners, fax machines, shredders, white boards, office chairs, and other traditional office supplies will be located on-site. Telework and remote work employees that wish to have these items at their remote site will need to purchase them with their own resources (unless a special situation is approved by their manager or department).

Phone and Internet Access:
High speed internet access and telephone services are required to work remotely for Virginia Tech. The telework or remote employee must provide their own Wi-Fi connectivity. All employees are assigned a university phone number. Those employees on-site full time will be provided a desktop phone. Telework/remote work employees have the option to use their personal phone or the Avaya phone service (Unified Communications under www.nis.vt.edu).

Security of Information:
- Employees working in remote locations, and their supervisors, must adhere to all applicable security procedures to ensure confidentiality and security of data. See University Policy No. 7025 Safeguarding Nonpublic Customer Information for guidance including federal regulations; University Policy No. 1060 Policy on Social Security Numbers addresses protection of social security numbers
- Employee's remote work computer shall be in compliance with all Virginia Tech guidelines for uses of hardware and software including virus protection software, licensing provisions, system security and passwords. University Policy No. 7010 Policy

for Securing Technology Resources and Services provides guidance in ensuring that all technology resources and services are as stable, secure, and trustworthy as possible
- The employee will protect all confidential University documents from unauthorized access.
- All products, documents and records that are used, developed, or revised while teleworking remain the property of Virginia Tech.

Hybrid Roles:

In addition, some roles may be suited for a certain amount of telework even if many of the responsibilities must be done at the regular work location. These roles could be considered for a limited amount of telework/remote work. This is considered a hybrid telework role and is likely to be the model for most teams. Desk and office sharing options will also be pursued for hybrid telework employees. Preference will be given to employees based on the percentage of time they work on-site. More details on employee requirements for at home office space.

Step 2: Determine the suitability of specific employees who are interested in teleworking/remote working

Once it has been determined that all or some of the role responsibilities can be performed outside of the regular work environment, it must be identified if the employee in this role is compatible to telework opportunities.

This must be considered on a case-by-case basis for current employees and must be considered when interviewing candidates for a remote or telework position.

The telework/remote work approval or denial determination is made by the employee's manager. This determination should be made from an employee's individualized request based on their assessment of their suitability for telework.

If the employee feels they need a workplace or at-home accommodation for teleworking/remote working, please have them contact ADA and Accessibility Services at adaaccess@vt.edu.

Using the Employee Telework Suitability Checklist, employees should complete the self-assessment and present it to their manager when requesting a telework option.

Factors for this determination should include but are not limited to:
- Employees with childcare or eldercare needs.
- Employees most recent performance history (including disciplinary action).
- Employees time management and organizational skills.
- Does the employee have the necessary computer skills to complete their required job functions outside of the office?
- Does the employee understand their role and expectations, and require little supervision to complete their tasks?
- Is the employee a self-starter and consistently meets deadlines?

A few things to keep in mind:
- Employees in their probationary period **should not** be approved for new telework/remote work unless deemed necessary by the manager or university official.
  - This may be waived for employees who are hired with a remote work option in place.
- If the employee is not well suited for telework/remote work or is denied based on a previously documented performance issue, it is best practice to communicate that reasoning with the employee.
  - In this instance, a discussion about job performance and growth opportunities should be had between the employee and their supervisor before the option for telework can be re-assessed in the future.
  - Supervisors should keep documentation of telework agreement approvals and denials for each employee.
  - As a supervisor, if you are unsure of how to approach this conversation with your employee, please contact your Human Resources representative or Employee Relations for guidance.
- The employee is in charge of setting up their workspace in a telework environment. This includes adequate access to the internet and a quiet place for calls or video meetings.
  - Employees should work with managers to establish work hours. These work hours should be added to the employee's email signature for transparency across the university.
  - Employees should designate "office" space and get IT support for their setup
  - Employees should try to minimize distractions in this area.
  - Employees should be cognizant of how their environment appears during video meetings.
  - Employees should be aware of their [child/eldercare during telework hours](#).

Step 3: Manager Responsibility to Ensure Telework & Remote Work Success

A manager should also consider their own management and supervision style, as well as their level of trust in the employee to perform their assigned job duties in a telework/remote work environment.

Use the Manager Telework Suitability Checklist to gauge how telework/remote work fits the employee, manager, and role together. Also consider if the employee has childcare or eldercare needs.

Step 4: Ensure Telework and Remote Work Success - Employee and Manager Training

Once you have determined that both the role and the employee are suitable for telework and remote work, the next step is to complete the appropriate training for the employee and manager recommended by Talent Development and found in the table below.

We strongly encourage supervisors and employees complete the recommend trainings listed below because they provide helpful information to ensure a successful telework/ remote work environment. The additional optional trainings listed below that supervisors and employees can complete provides additional telework coaching, resources, and guidelines.

Courses are completed through LinkedIn Learning from the Talent Development Canvas site. Key takeaways can also be found on Canvas for several of these courses. Check out Talent Development's Virtual Learning Center for other virtual training opportunities under the categories of learning, leading, and working.

Recommended Manager Training	Recommended Employee Training
Managing Virtual Teams (56m)	Tips for Working Remotely (32m)
Communicating with Transparency (37m)	Digital Body Language (25m)
Developing Adaptability as a Manager (33m)	*How to be an Adaptable Employee during Change and Uncertainty* (35m)

Optional Manager Training	Optional Employee Training
Remote Work Foundations (60m)	Remote Work Foundations (60m)
Digital Body Language (25m)	Leading and Working in Teams (25m)
Leading and Working in Teams (25m)	Leading from the Middle (49m)
Leading Virtual Meetings (32m)	Leading Virtual Meetings (32m)
Advice for Leaders during a Crisis (43m)	Effective Listening (1h 4m)
Leadership Foundations (40m)	Building Resilience (35m)
Having Difficult Conversations: Advice for Managers (59m)	How to Manage Feeling Overwhelmed (44m)
Effective Listening (1h 4m)	
Leading from a Distance (36m)	
Tips for Working Remotely (32m)	
How to Manage Feeling Overwhelmed (44m)	

Step 5: Tips for entering into a Telework Agreement

Be Specific:
After determining that both the role and employee are suitable for telework/remote work and both the manager and employee have completed their talent development courses it is time to create a telework agreement that establishes the specifics.

This should include, but is not limited to:
- Days of the week that the employee can telework/remote work.
- Expectations of the level of communication and responsiveness expected on telework/remote workdays. This should be from both the employee and the manager.
- Expectations of attendance for meetings and other interactions across the university and with customers.
- Any other expectations of work to be done and metrics on how this work will be recorded.

Additionally, expectations for communication between both the employee and manager should be identified and discussed ahead of time. These topics should include:

- Balance of presence in virtual and on-site meetings.
- Performance management expectations and metrics of monitoring work performance.
- Physical space arrangement and accommodations including what technology is necessary to perform work functions outside of the office.
- Balance of employee childcare or eldercare needs.
- Managing various work styles including communication expectations from both manager and employee.
    - Mediums to be considered in maintaining communication include Zoom, email, phone, IM such as Skype or Microsoft Teams, etc.
- Telecommuting/remote work is not designed to be a replacement for appropriate childcare. *During the COVID-19 crisis, flexibility will be granted to employees to assist with balancing childcare issues due to flexing school / childcare schedules.
    - 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. Prospective telecommuters/remote workers are encouraged to discuss expectations of telecommuting/remote work with family members prior to entering a trial period.
- Managing other distractions at home and setting expectations for professionalism to include dress code.

Develop the Telework Agreement:
From there, complete the Telework Agreement form on the Virginia Tech website. Instructions for completing the telework agreement are available should you need them.

If a telework and remote work engagement is agreed upon, and the employee will be based out of state (i.e. their residence will be outside of Virginia), the manager should contact the Payroll Department at payroll@vt.edu to confirm that Virginia Tech is registered with that state for tax purposes.

Conditions of Employment:
- Performance expectations and evaluations will not change as a result of telework. Conditions of employment will remain the same, and expectations should be clear and measurable. The manager will evaluate employee's job performance in accordance with applicable performance planning and evaluation, and probationary policies.
- Salary and benefits will not be affected by telework or remote work.
- Arrangements that assure adequate communication between employee, co-workers, manager, and customers must be established. For example:
    - Establish regular check-in times or plans to email when workday begins and ends.
    - Use shared calendars to post schedules of teleworkers, on-site colleagues, and

managers.
- Use basic communication tools such as phone, email, and/or instant messaging, and consider collaborative tools such as audio and video conferencing.
- Coordinate staff meetings and telework schedules, promoting team cohesion and social interaction; it may be necessary for the teleworker to come to the workplace for such events.
- The Telework Agreement does not automatically go with an employee in a new position or apply when a position previously done via remote/telework is assumed by a new employee. A new telework agreement should be requested and reviewed when the above situations occur.
- Flexibility with childcare and eldercare will be granted when working in an alternate location due to COVID-19.

Hours of Work:
- The required number of work hours will not change, and employees are responsible for reporting time worked, leave used, and for adhering to university and state attendance policies.
- Overtime Worked during remote/telework schedules will be treated no differently than regular work hours. Supervisors must approve any overtime. Failure to do so may result in termination of the telework arrangement and/or disciplinary action. See University Policy No. 4320: Guidelines for the Fair Labor Standards Act for more information.
- For non-exempt employees, hours worked must be recorded just as they would be during normal working hours at the central location.
    - Sick/annual leave is recorded based on the number of hours an employee is scheduled to work on the day he/she uses the leave, whether he/she is at the central or alternate work location.
    - Paid holidays will count as 8 hours if falling on a day scheduled for telework.
    - A meal break of at least 30 minutes must be provided to employees working more than six (6) consecutive hours. It is NOT included in hours worked and must be recorded.
    - Days worked at the alternate location must be approved by the supervisor.
- Authorized closings will apply to the teleworker as he/she will be unable to remain in contact with supervisor and co-workers. Essential employees are the exception and will receive compensatory leave for hours worked.

- Supervisors may require employees to report to a central workplace for work-related events or may meet with him/her in the alternate location, if needed.
- Remote/Telework is not to be used in place of sick or annual leave; however, in consultation with HR, a department may choose to offer telework arrangements as an opportunity for partial or full return to work based on university policy and the criteria normally applied to decisions regarding the approval of telework.
- Flexibility with childcare and eldercare will be granted when working in an alternate location due to COVID-19.

Safety:
- Virginia Tech does not assume responsibility for injury to any persons other than the teleworker arising out of duties at the telework site during the set work hours.
- Employees are covered by the Commonwealth's Workers' Compensation Program if injured while performing official duties at the central workplace or an alternate work location and must immediately notify the supervisor of an injury sustained at a telework site and complete an Employer's Accident Report. Once an employee reports a job-related injury, the supervisor or department personnel must immediately file the Employer's Accident Report Form. Visit this website for more information.
- Supervisors may wish to include additional conditions in their work agreements that require employees to confirm that the alternate work location is, to the best of their knowledge, free of recognized hazards that could cause physical harm. Employees should agree to practice the same safety habits they would use while at the university and to maintain safe conditions in their alternate work locations.

Telework/Remote Work Suitability Checklist
- Employee Telework Suitability Checklist
- Manager Telework Suitability Checklist

Additional Resources

Virginia Tech's Telework Policy and Agreement Form:
- Policy No. 4325 Alternate Work Site and Telework Policy
- Virginia Tech Telework Agreement
- Instructions for completing the telework agreement
- Hokie Wellness - Flexible Work Options

Official Department of Human Resource Management Telework Policy:

- DHRM Policy 1.61 Teleworking
- DHRM Quick Guide: Managing Teleworkers

Telework flow chart