

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I have assumed supervision of a group of employees who currently have a diverse range of flexible work arrangements. I may need to change these or I may not – but first I need to get handle on them. Where do I begin?

Refer to [Evaluating, Managing and Measuring Flexible Work Arrangements](#) for general practices and guidelines. You will want to start by documenting what work arrangements are currently in place – a chart or spreadsheet showing each person’s schedule can help you see where there may be gaps as well as logical parameters for core hours, staff meetings, and so on. Compare what’s in place to your operational principles and current and projected business needs. Is there any overlap in the current set of work arrangements? Are there significant gaps?

You will also have to assess performance. If the work isn’t getting done to a satisfactory degree, you should revisit whether alternative work arrangements are the cause – or could be part of the solution. If you need to make changes to an employee’s schedule, you should, where possible, provide reasonable notice before altering the current arrangement.

Even if you ultimately determine that you are comfortable with the current arrangements, keep in mind that FWAs should be reviewed at least annually. Yearly performance conversations are a good time to discuss flex.

What role should an employee’s reason for proposing a flexible work arrangement play in whether or not I grant a proposal?

Employees are not required to give a reason when submitting flexible work arrangement proposals. A supervisor should evaluate each proposal on the business case, and should not deny a proposal based on an employee’s reason (or perceived lack of reason). Sometimes an employee may not wish to do so, especially if private family issues are the reason.

If issues of health, disability or family caregiving are directly stated or appear to emerge during conversations with an employee about flexibility, you must pause the flexwork process and consult with HR to determine if the employee’s proposal for a flexwork arrangement should now be considered under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or should be explored as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees and managers are encouraged to visit the University Disability Services (UDS) [website](#) to learn more about reasonable accommodations.

However, many employees will volunteer the reason why they are proposing a flexible work arrangement. Knowing the reason for an employee’s proposal may help a manager, especially when evaluating multiple proposals. It can be useful to know the parameters of each employee’s proposal, so that if their proposals don’t mesh, you can work together to generate alternative solutions. For example, if two employees propose a compressed work week with Fridays off, it can help to know that one person is hoping to attend a class at a specific time and the other wants one day to do volunteer work, but doesn’t care which day it is. Managers should let their employees know that they do not need to know about the reason.



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Can my supervisor change my flexible schedule back to a regular schedule at any time?

Your work schedule is subject to change based on business needs. Your manager will try to provide you with reasonable notice before altering the current arrangement.

Can I change my FWA if it's not working out for me?

A new FWA should be reviewed in the first 30 days to ensure it is effectively meeting the needs of the employee and the business. To propose a different flexible work arrangement at any time (e.g., change from compressed work week to job sharing), a new written proposal should be submitted to your manager for consideration. A written proposal should also be given to your manager if you would like a return to your previous work schedule—but remember that this is not always possible. For example, in some cases budgetary limitations may preclude increasing hours (e.g., if you have been part-time and want to return to full-time, your hours may have been reassigned).

Is there a limit to the number of people in one area who can submit proposals?

While each FWA proposal should be reviewed on its own merits, a manager should first assess the overall needs of the department or unit as the foundation for approving a flexible work arrangement. Since it is important to provide coverage to meet the demands of the office, it may be useful to establish a process for handling multiple proposals before any FWA is implemented. Often teams can work together to find alternatives that will work for the whole group.

Rather than determining an arbitrary limit to the number of FWAs in any department, each FWA proposal should be reviewed on its own merits. However, a manager should first assess the overall needs of the department or unit as the foundation for approving a flexible work arrangement. Proposals that are submitted after other FWAs have been in place for some time may be difficult to approve as they may conflict with pre-existing arrangements. It can be useful to establish a process for handling multiple proposals, and approved arrangements should be transparent to all. Over time, as business and personal needs change, teams can work together to find new alternatives that work for the whole group.

What if my supervisor says “no” to my proposal?

The University is not obligated to approve flexible work arrangements for any employee (setting aside any obligations under the ADA or FMLA). Each proposal should be considered on its own merits. Make sure you clearly understand the reason(s) your manager gave for not approving your proposal. In some cases, it may be useful to work with one of the University's resources to help managers and employees refine flexible work arrangements for their mutual benefit.



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Resources include:

- Local HR offices;
- Office of Work/Life, whose staff coach both employees and managers
- Your union representative if you are covered by a union contract; HUCTW members may note that if a proposed FWA is not approved, the proposal may be explored further in consultation with the human resources department and HUCTW
- University Ombudsman Office
- Harvard Medical School Ombudsman's Office (serving Longwood Medical Area)
- University Disability Services, which works with HR, managers and employees regarding the reasonable accommodation process under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Office of Labor and Employee Relations, which works with HR, managers, employees and union representatives

Do I have to give a reason for wanting a flexible work arrangement?

No. Proposals for flexible work arrangements should be evaluated on how business needs will be met and how the work will get done, as well as on an employee's likelihood of success with the arrangement, based on his or her recent past performance. Managers should not evaluate a flexible work arrangement based on an employee's reason for proposing it. In fact, employees can let their managers know that they have omitted the reason and ask that the proposal be considered on the business merits.

If you are seeking a flexible work arrangement to manage a health or caregiving-related situation for yourself or a family member, you should present the proposal without reason and have it initially be reviewed on its business merits. If it is denied, you should then consult with HR to determine if your situation would be more appropriately considered under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or should be explored as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees and managers are encouraged to visit the University Disability Services (UDS) [website](#) to learn more about reasonable accommodations.

I proposed a flexible schedule previously and was turned down. May I try again?

First consider why your proposal was denied. If you don't fully understand the reason your proposal was denied, ask your manager to clarify the business or performance reasons. Then do some research and determine if you can build a case for an alternative that might work for your particular situation. If at this point you believe that your proposal or circumstances are different enough, then you might ask your supervisor/manager to consider your new proposal and to discuss other alternatives.

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Can any employee propose a flexible work arrangement?

Any employee may submit a proposal for a flexible work arrangement (FWA) to his or her manager.

Under Harvard's guidelines, managers should give consideration to all proposals to ensure a fair process for all employees. Remember—"fair" does not equal "same". The process should be consistent to ensure equity between employees, but each outcome will be based on the particular circumstances of the proposal, the job and the person, with approval based on a proposal that supports the needs of both the University and the individual.

Keeping this in mind, however, not all jobs are suitable for such an arrangement, and managers are not required to approve proposals for flexible work arrangements. Depending on the nature or location of a particular job, some types of alternative work arrangement may not be appropriate.

A history of poor performance might also be a reason for the denial of a proposal. In some cases, it may be that a flexible schedule might alleviate the root causes of problems like tardiness and result in improved performance. In these situations, piloting the flexible work arrangement for 30 days could help in determining the viability of an FWA.