Flexible Work Principles & Guidelines

The Office of Work/Life
Harvard University
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Introduction

Harvard University aims for excellence in its administrative operations and the employment experience it provides. Flexible work arrangements can contribute to this excellence, providing the potential for employees to perform consistently at the highest levels, work together efficiently and effectively to meet the University’s mission and business objectives, and maintain a good quality of life.

When flexibility is well integrated with a performance-based culture, it becomes a strategic tool to achieve business goals and to optimize engagement. Harvard is committed to implementing flexible work arrangements that support:

- A high-performance, results-based work environment where highly engaged individuals, groups, and managers can thrive;
- Business continuity in the case of disruptions caused by factors such as construction or weather; and
- The University’s sustainability goals and commitment to employee wellbeing.

Without prescribing specific solutions for the wide range of differences in jobs, units and organizational objectives, these guidelines prescribe a common process that will ensure fair consideration across the University. We encourage employees and managers to read the guidelines thoroughly to understand their general principles.

What Do We Mean When We Say "Flex?"

Flexible work arrangements—also known as “flexwork” or simply “flex”—are workplace arrangements that vary from the standard 9-to-5, in-the-office approach. They typically include flexibility of time and/or place. There are two types of flexible work:

- **Occasional** flexibility responds to one-time or intermittent needs and may not require a formal proposal. (But establishing parameters in writing encourages “ground rules” at any level of frequency.)
- **Formal** flexibility is an ongoing change to an employee’s regular way of working and always requires a formal proposal.

➢ These guidelines may be updated from time to time. To be sure you are referring to the most recent version, please visit [https://hr.harvard.edu](https://hr.harvard.edu).
➢ These guidelines are just the beginning! For more detailed information and to drill down on specific topics, please see *Flexwork Tools and Resources*, online and as a downloadable PDF.
A Glossary of Key Flexwork Terms

A shared understanding of key terms and their definitions is critical, since misunderstandings can lead to confusion or conflict. Managers and employees should take some time to review and get aligned on a common vocabulary so they can effectively communicate about a potential or current flexwork arrangement.

While many people think of working from home when they hear the word “flexibility,” flexible work can actually take many forms. Flexwork arrangements address when, where and/or how work gets done and typically consist of one or a combination of the elements described below. (Some of these arrangements may have an impact on compensation and/or benefits; for more information, see Compensation Grid in Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.)

When

- **Flextime**: Employees work a standard full-time or part-time work week with start and end times that differ from the regularly scheduled workday. Core hours (i.e., the hours during which all employees must be present) are established by the manager.

- **Compressed Work Week**: Full-time employees compress a full-time workload to complete all job responsibilities into fewer than five days per week (usually completing one week’s work in four days, or 4/5) or in fewer than ten days over two weeks (usually completing two weeks’ work in nine days, or 9/10).

  **Note:**
  - “Summer hours” policies may fit under a compressed work week arrangement.
  - Because exempt employees are paid to complete their assigned work rather than by the number of hours worked, compressed work week schedules for exempt employees are structured around the needs of the work and may vary from week to week. (For more information, see FAQs in Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.)

Where

- **Telework**: Employees work part of the standard work week (typically one to three days per week) at a location other than the designated worksite, such as at a home office, on a regularly scheduled basis or for specific circumstances (for example, during snow emergencies, or for special projects). Teleworkers may have designated or shared workspaces at the office, which may change from day to day (the practice of using different, temporary work stations is known as “hoteling”).

- **Remote Work**: Employees perform the majority of job responsibilities from a location other than the primary worksite, including another Harvard site.

  **Notes:**
  - Employees may not care for children and/or adults, or work on any substantial non-Harvard project when teleworking or working remotely.
  - Harvard is registered to conduct business only in Massachusetts and California. In general, working remotely is permitted only in those jurisdictions, and telework outside those states is permitted only for very short periods. (For detailed information on this issue, see Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.)
How

- **Reduced Hours**: A form of temporary part-time work in which an employee reduces the number of hours of employment from their regular full-time or part-time schedule, either working some portion of every day or fewer than 5 days per week, with reduced job responsibilities. Salary and some benefits are pro-rated.

- **Job Sharing**: A form of regular part-time work in which two employees share the responsibilities of one full-time position (FTE) with salary and some benefits shared/pro-rated. Division of hours and responsibilities between job sharing partners can vary.

- **Transition to/from Leave**: A specific form of part-time work designed to support a person’s ability to ease back into work after taking a leave of any kind. Telework is sometimes included in the transition request.

**Six Basic Principles of Workplace Flexibility at Harvard**

Harvard has established the following principles to ensure an equitable process for all employees, support business objectives, and create a work environment that supports employees’ full engagement:

1. **A written proposal is required**: Formal flexwork requires a detailed proposal using the proposal form, available online and below, which addresses how, when and where work will be performed. Employees should also speak with their managers or HR department about local policies and practices.

2. **The process is equitable**: All managers are expected to consider all formal flexwork proposals objectively and fairly to ensure an equitable process across the University (but are not obligated to approve them).

3. **Decisions are reason-neutral**: The personal circumstances of individuals, or their reasons for proposing flexwork, should not drive the decision to approve or deny the FWA. (Learn more about the role of the reason and personal bias in evaluating proposals, on page 5, below).

4. **Flexwork is job-appropriate**: Flexwork may not be suitable for every job. In particular, many types of jobs require employees to be on-site full-time or at regularly scheduled times. (See the Job Considerations Grid for guidance in Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.)

5. **Flexwork has a net-neutral or net-positive effect**: Once approved and implemented, flexwork should have either a net-positive or net-neutral effect on business results and the work environment.

6. **Flex arrangements are responsive**: Flexwork arrangements are meant to be responsive to the changing needs of the workplace, and should be reviewed and updated both as needs change and, at a minimum, annually. Flexwork arrangements should not be considered permanent.
For Employees: Creating a Proposal

Formal flexwork must be proposed in writing using the proposal form (in this document, and available online as a fillable PDF form at https://hr.harvard.edu). This should be followed by a formal conversation (some managers also like to start with a conversation before receiving the written document). The proposal form is not a one-size-fits-all document and includes optional sections. It is designed to provide a format for best practices and common sense decisions. It can:

- **Assist employees** in thinking through and developing specific flexwork proposals
- **Guide managers** in evaluating flexwork proposals objectively and equitably
- **Ensure equitable treatment** for all employees who propose flexwork
- **Assist managers who are reviewing multiple proposals** in understanding overall team and operational impacts
- **Enable successful implementation** of flexwork through improved clarity and alignment on the specifics of how the arrangements will work
- **Serve as a basis for ongoing conversations** between employees and managers

If you are a member of a union, you should refer to your contract regarding flexibility provisions. If there is a conflict between the language in one of Harvard’s union contracts and the Harvard flexibility guidelines, the union contract language prevails.

Proposals should address how, when and where work will get done without a net-negative impact on the organization or on co-workers, faculty or students, as well as ways to evaluate and measure the success of performance objectives.

Additional Considerations for Telework Proposals

When writing a proposal for telework, employees should keep in mind that only Harvard University related work should be conducted when teleworking or working remotely, and therefore should not anticipate attending to non-Harvard projects. The following conditions apply University-wide:

- Employees may not care for children and/or adults when teleworking or working remotely.
- Employees may not work on any non-Harvard project during paid work hours when teleworking or working remotely.

In general, teleworkers should expect to attempt to replicate the working conditions of a Harvard-provided office. Major activities that wouldn’t be a normal part of the on-campus workday (such as full-time care for an infant throughout the day) would not be appropriate while teleworking. Activities that might normally be interspersed throughout the day at the office (such as taking check-in calls from an elder caregiver during the day) would be acceptable if they did not interfere with expected routines and deliverables. Questions about such distinctions should be discussed between managers and employees with input from HR as needed.

You can find additional resources, tools and University partners to help you navigate the FWA process in Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.

When Health May be at Issue

If you are seeking a flexible work arrangement to manage a health or caregiving-related situation for yourself or a family member, you should 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.
For Employees and Managers: The Role of the Reason

Why pursue flexibility? Flexibility may be desirable for many reasons, whether it is to pursue athletic or artistic goals, care for children or elders, or improve a commute. A well-established body of research suggests that flexibility works best for the business when work needs, not just personal needs are clearly met.

- **Employees** are encouraged not to lead with the reason they are requesting flexibility; rather, they should focus on creating a proposal that makes a solid business case.
- **Managers** should evaluate all proposals with consistent work-based criteria, rather than focusing on why an employee wants to adopt a flexwork arrangement.

Depending on the nature of the relationship between a manager and employee, it may feel comfortable and desirable to discuss the circumstances surrounding the flexwork proposal. In many other cases, employees may be very private about such disclosures or managers may feel uncomfortable knowing about personal motivations.

However receptive to discussing the personal motivations for proposals, managers should avoid asking employees to provide a reason as part of the flexwork proposal and should avoid making judgments about reasons when an employee does disclose them. Each of these personal reasons may be of real importance, but only in certain circumstances will they be considered when evaluating a proposal.

If, as either the employee or the manager, you feel strongly that you must use the reason for the request as a factor in negotiating a flexwork arrangement, keep in mind that discussions of personal considerations inevitably call on our biases. While it may seem obvious to you that one reason has more validity than another (e.g. school is more important than training for a marathon), it’s critical to avoid pitting one employee’s values against another’s. If you stay in the realm of workplace needs and work performance goals, you are less likely to be put in a position to arbitrate worthiness.
For Managers: Evaluating a Proposal

All employees may propose flexwork, and each proposal should be evaluated on the merits of its business case. Managers and supervisors are responsible for considering proposals objectively and fairly, but are not obligated to grant approval.

Employees are required to submit written proposals, but managers may wish to bookend the proposal with conversations. You may wish to begin by setting expectations, on the individual or team level, about the proposal process. It is ultimately the manager’s decision to approve or decline a proposal. If a proposal is declined, however, you should provide a business reason for your decision.

Be sure to touch base with your HR department about local policies and practices. A best practice approach to evaluating proposals and designing flexwork includes the following steps:

Set performance goals: Clarify the unit’s and employee’s goals. Flexible work arrangements work best when both the manager and the employee understand the expected results of the employee’s work, and the performance-based criteria for assessment that will be used.

Set the non-negotiable schedule parameters: Before discussing individual schedules, determine an overall department schedule. For example, the schedule parameters of a specific department might specify that:

- Telephone coverage must be in place five days a week, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Everyone must attend Tuesday afternoon staff meetings.
- Everyone must be available for a weekly check-in at a mutually convenient time.
- Everyone must be reachable by phone, text or email during regular business hours, Tuesday through Thursday.
- Exempt employees who are working a compressed work week must be reachable on their so-called “free day” for time-sensitive concerns, and be willing to attend meetings that are scheduled in advance and require that person’s presence.
- Everyone must be available for seasonal and peak “all hands on deck” periods.
- Consider limits on when emails may be sent to others (for example, no midnight messaging) to avoid sending additional, unintended messages such as, “I’m working now—so you should be working, too.”

Set core hours: Many managers will establish core hours, which means the hours during which everyone must be physically present or available (e.g., daily between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., or every Thursday for a staff meeting). They may also establish the outer boundaries of the hours during which anyone may work in the office (for example, no earlier than 7 a.m. or later than 7 p.m.). Once managers establish their principles, they can determine the hours that need to be covered.

Remember that employees value control over their schedules, so it is important to balance employee autonomy with the needs for access to supervision, resources and other team members, while also limiting boundless productivity expectations.

Consider each employee’s proposal: Does it fit into the core hours and follow other set principles? Does it address their work priorities? Has the employee reviewed and affirmed that they meet the Information Security requirements for remote work? Has the employee shown that job duties (including those that affect others) can be performed fully under the proposed arrangement? Has the employee demonstrated convincing “wins” for the department? Does performance history show that this employee can manage the arrangement? Have you had candid conversations about anything that might make you hesitate to approve the proposal?
Consider a group of proposals together, if applicable: If several employees have submitted proposals, consider whether they work together. If they leave gaps, consider a group meeting including employees to bring up concerns, make adjustments and find innovative solutions among the group. For example, one employee who wants to work 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. may leave the unit with an afternoon gap, until another employee points out that she would be just as happy to work 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Yet another employee may want to telework late at night when others have shut down for the day, putting colleagues out of sync and out of touch with each other. That’s why it is useful for the manager to set the parameters.

Approve or deny based on business reasons: Proposals are expected to explain in detail how the proposed arrangement will benefit the department and support its business goals and objectives. A small inconvenience in one area may be outweighed by a greater benefit to the unit overall even if only realized in the long run. The goal should be a net-positive or net-neutral impact on the work and the people. Managers should keep an open mind regarding flex work, but never agree to changes that could undermine business goals or burden other staff.

If Health Issues Emerge
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.

For Employees and Managers: When a Proposal is Not Approved
Managers should give concrete feedback about why the proposal was denied. It may be because of a lack of sufficient detail about how, where, and when work will get done; or a history of underperformance on the job; or simply that the job itself is not suitable for the kind of arrangement proposed by the employee.

Whatever the reason, it is important to have candid conversations about flex. If such conversations are not easy, both employees and managers can contact Harvard’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for coaching on having challenging conversations. HUCTW members should note that if a proposed arrangement is not approved, the proposal may be explored further in consultation with the human resources department and HUCTW. All employees have a range of other resources as well. For more information, see the FAQs in the Flexwork Tools and Resources, online and as a downloadable PDF.
## Quick Start Guide

The guidelines for flexwork are brief, therefore we encourage you to read them. If you need to get started quickly and are looking for a general framework, please see the steps below.

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<tr>
<th>I am</th>
<th>An employee</th>
<th>A manager</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to</td>
<td>Submit a new flexwork proposal</td>
<td>Review a new flexwork proposal</td>
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<td>Take these steps:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Download the proposal form</td>
<td>Have at least one formal conversation with your direct report</td>
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<td>Draft the proposal and submit it to your manager</td>
<td>Review the proposal based on business needs and in the context of your whole unit or team</td>
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<td>Schedule and hold at least one conversation with your manager about your proposal, either before or after you submit your draft</td>
<td>Provide feedback to your direct report</td>
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<td>Refine the proposal, as needed</td>
<td>Review another version, if needed</td>
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<td>Make a decision to grant or deny the proposal</td>
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<td>Review the decision with your manager</td>
<td>Review the decision with your direct report</td>
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<td>If yes, begin a trial period</td>
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<td>If no, strive to understand the reason</td>
<td>If no, provide detail on your reason</td>
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<th>An employee</th>
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<tr>
<td>I want to</td>
<td>Review existing flexwork arrangements</td>
<td>Participate in a review of an existing flexwork arrangement</td>
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<td>Take these steps:</td>
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<td>Discuss with the individual/team your intention to review the flexwork arrangements</td>
<td>Understand that FWAs should be reviewed regularly as a matter of practice</td>
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<td>Where relevant, seek input from stakeholders, using consistent questions based on business needs</td>
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<td>Seek input from relevant partners (HR, other subject-matter experts)</td>
<td>Consider your arrangement in the context of stakeholder feedback</td>
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<td>Review individual FWAs in the context of the team</td>
<td>Consider your arrangement and those of others in a group context</td>
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<td>Prepare comments and review them with the employee(s)</td>
<td>Identify potential improvements</td>
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<td>Identify any changes and set a timeline for renewal, evaluation, or sunsetting</td>
<td>Meet with your manager</td>
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<td>Document and submit to HR, if required</td>
<td>Discuss ideas about improving work processes or simply improving the arrangement itself</td>
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