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Flexwork at Harvard

Harvard University aims for inclusive excellence in all of its operations and the employment experience it provides. Flexwork contributes to this excellence by providing the potential for employees to perform consistently at the highest levels, work together efficiently and effectively to meet the University’s academic and business objectives, rise together to the challenges facing the contemporary workforce, and remain nimble during periods of disruption. When flexibility is well integrated with a performance-based culture, it becomes a strategic tool to achieve business goals and to support wellbeing in the workplace, in the home, and beyond.

Since the onset of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 public health emergency, Harvard has used remote work as a key strategy to sustain operational continuity while reducing density and exposure for those who must work on campus. In recent months, departments and units across Harvard have implemented or increased telework under these new circumstances. Employees who can work remotely have been asked to do so indefinitely, unless specifically advised to return to on-campus work. Schools, departments and units are best equipped to know who among their faculty and staff need to be on campus and how much, based on the requirements of the position. HR offers a template to help determine why certain jobs need to be performed on campus and think through the implications. Managers are encouraged to work with their teams to restructure work and to re-engineer processes where possible, empowering employees through trust and transparency to enable remote work.

Previously, Harvard had required employees to submit a written proposal to propose flexwork arrangements. In light of the pandemic, employees who are able to work remotely are not asked to submit a proposal because they are being required to work remotely. That said, it is nonetheless important for managers and employees to have frequent and thoughtful conversations about how, when, what and where job functions will be completed. Employees and managers are encouraged to help define their plans using this Flexwork Form.

The principles in the following pages are intended to provide a conceptual foundation for best practices and common-sense decisions. Few will argue that such a sudden and massive pivot to remote work is optimal. But with continued grit and creativity, managers and employees will benefit from sharing the burden of trade-offs to protect an effective but still new way of working, personal wellbeing, and inclusive excellence throughout the University.

New World of Flexwork

Flexwork has long been a component of Harvard’s workforce practices. When implemented by Schools, departments and units as appropriate to their local business needs, flexwork becomes a strategic tool to achieve institutional goals, empower employees to do their best work and to foster engagement. Harvard is committed to implementing flexwork arrangements that support:

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

The onset of the coronavirus public-health emergency has raised the profile and accelerated the pace of departmental adoption of flexwork, which underscores the need for employees and managers alike to become familiar with the basic tenets of flexwork at Harvard. Below you will find the basic definitions of the components of flexwork, and six key principles of flexwork at Harvard, updated for the current circumstances.
A Glossary of Key Flexwork Terms

Flexwork refers to flexible work arrangements that vary from the standard 9-to-5, in-the-office approach. They typically include flexibility of time and/or place. A shared understanding of key terms and their definitions is critical since misunderstandings can lead to confusion, conflict or missed opportunities. 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 as we settle into widespread remote work. Refer to the Coronavirus Workplace Policies for more information.

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. This could also include a split schedule where the employee works a full 7, 7.5, or 8-hour day in two or more periods. (Ex. 6-10 AM, and 4-8 PM).

- **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, known as a “4/5” schedule) or in fewer than ten days over two weeks (usually completing two weeks’ work in nine days, or “9/10”). Compressed workweeks, in any configuration, bring special challenges. It is best to begin with what you might consider a trial period to determine operational feasibility and identify potential payroll complications for over-time eligible employees. Moreover, because exempt employees are paid to complete their assigned work rather than by the number of hours worked, compressed workweek schedules should be structured around outcomes and deliverables, which may vary from week to week.

Where

- **Telework**: Employees work part of the standard workweek at a location other than the designated worksite, such as at a home office. This group includes people who must be on campus for some amount of time either regularly or periodically but can also perform some portion of their work remotely.

- **Remote Work**: Employees perform all of their job functions off-campus, typically at home.

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 five 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. The division of hours and responsibilities between job sharing partners can vary.

Note: Employees may combine arrangements, for example: working from home full-time (remote work) and adjusting their hours to differ from standard schedules such as 6 AM – 2 PM (flextime).
Six Basic Principles of Flexwork at Harvard

Flexwork has been available and utilized by many employees for years. For others, it is a new and necessary way of working. Harvard has updated the six basic principles of flexwork to reflect these transformative times. The principles are intended to ensure an equitable process for all employees, support business objectives, and create a work environment that supports both the University and our employees’ needs.

1. **Defining the arrangement using the Flexwork Form is encouraged, but not required:** Previously, Harvard had required employees to submit a written proposal to propose flexwork arrangements. In light of the pandemic, employees who are able to work remotely are not required to submit a proposal; instead, staff and managers are encouraged to have frequent and thoughtful conversations about how, when, what and where job functions will be completed. Employees and managers are encouraged to use this Flexwork Form to guide them as they discuss, agree to, and, when appropriate, document their approach to work. These practices help set expectations and help with planning both on personal and business levels.

2. **The process is equitable:** Even if remote work is temporarily the standard for those whose jobs allow it, there will still be situations in which employees or managers want to make adjustments to their on-campus/hybrid/off-campus status, or their schedules, or both. It is the manager’s role to evaluate the team’s work and prioritize what must be completed and by whom. It is essential that managers work with their employees objectively and fairly to ensure an equitable process when approving new or changing flexwork arrangements. Given the new reality of such widespread work from home, personal circumstances will indeed factor into some decisions, and outcomes will not be the same for everyone. However, the process by which flexwork arrangements are assessed is most fair when it is consistent and transparent.

3. **Decisions are without bias or favoritism:** It is critical to remove personal bias from flexwork discussions and decisions. Previously, Harvard’s flexwork guidelines emphasized that the manager should not ask about an individual’s personal circumstances or base their approval or denial of a flexwork arrangement on the employee’s reason for the request. The principle of respecting an employee’s privacy and evaluating a proposal on its business merits holds true during the COVID-19 crisis. The uncertainty of child care, schools and elder care services mean, however, that some employees must balance work and family responsibilities in ways that bring these issues to the forefront to a new degree. Managers are encouraged to work with their employees to find creative ways to accomplish job responsibilities, along with personal responsibilities, whenever possible. Framing this as a mutual responsibility to address important demands on both sides of the employer-employee equation will encourage honest and practical conversations. It is wise to touch base with local HR to ensure that new arrangements make sense in the context of local policies and practices.

4. **Flexwork is job-appropriate:** Flexwork may not be suitable for every job. Historically, many types of jobs have been seen as requiring employees to be onsite full-time or at regularly scheduled times. Due to the current circumstances, however, employees and managers are finding new and innovative ways to accomplish job responsibilities flexibly and to determine which tasks must be accomplished on campus and which can be done off-campus, sometimes adopting a hybrid approach.

5. **Flexwork has a net-neutral or net-positive effect:** Under optimal conditions, once approved and implemented, flexwork should have either a net-positive or net-neutral effect on business results and the work environment. In other words, the same work is getting accomplished at another time, in another place, or in another way, and it is having a positive effect or, in some cases, a mixed effect. By that, we mean that, on balance, the arrangement does not have an overall negative impact on the team or the work. When social infrastructures are disrupted, however, managers should empower employees to explore pragmatic approaches to accomplishing as much as possible when working remotely, and to understand what other options are available, should the arrangement become untenable (see, for example, Use of Sick Time and Dependent Care Sick Time.)
Flexwork is 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. In typical times, a trial period is encouraged, and flexwork arrangements should not be considered permanent. Today, Harvard’s workforce is continually adjusting to the unpredictable evolution of this public health crisis. Employees and managers should engage in frequent and thoughtful communication around emerging trade-offs, as the public health landscape and personal circumstances and business needs evolve.

**Flexwork Basics/Getting Started/Settling In**

By now, most employees who can do some or all of their job activities remotely are doing so. Employees in this situation have been advised that this may continue indefinitely, or at least through the end of December 2020. Whether you are just getting started or have settled in, there are many factors to consider while working away from your campus workstation.

- **Ergonomics:** In many cases, our sudden shift to telework presents unique ergonomic challenges. Many people have makeshift home workstations that don’t support the neutral postures necessary to work in a physically safe and sustainable way. As you settle into your home workspace for both the short term and long term, you should take stock of how the physical environment affects your concentration and comfort. See the Environmental, Health, and Safety ergonomics page for tools to assess the ergonomics of your set-up and make simple, free or low-cost adjustments. Taking responsibility for this aspect of remote work will serve you well over the long haul. This Telecommuting Ergonomics Fact Sheet is also a helpful tool to review.

- **Technology:** Some employees are provided basic equipment by their departments to enable remote work, including laptops, monitors, VPN, etc. Each School is managing technology equipment directly. Speak to your manager, should you find the need for different approaches or equipment to work successfully from home. There are several online collaboration tools for teams to stay connected. Many schools have introduced Microsoft Teams and Zoom to enable shared learning and work. Check out HUIT’s IT for Working Remotely page for more information.

- **Information Technology Security:** Keeping your work at Harvard safe and secure remains your responsibility. All employees must follow Harvard’s information security policy and consider which of three secure configuration options will best serve remote work during what could be a protracted period. HUIT’s Work Securely Everywhere flyer offers tips to ensure a secure work-from-home experience.

- **Communication:** With the participation of all members, teams should develop a communication plan that sets expectations and protocols. The plan should include:
  
  - **Communication Tools** – Establish two to four agreed-upon tools that the team will use (emails, Teams, IM, personal cell phones, Zoom, etc.). HUIT’s Work Remotely site provides an overview of the tools and resources you’ll need for productive remote work, including information security requirements for your personal devices.
  
  - **Formal and Informal Communication Methods** – Define how team meetings, one-on-one leader meetings, staff meetings and other forms of communication will be used during this period and establish if and when it is appropriate to use personal modes of communication such as non-Harvard cell phones.
  
  - **Expectations of Each Other** – The team should collaborate and agree on a window for responsiveness. Teams may also need to adjust their practices around timelines, deadlines, and accountability. A daily one-paragraph productivity report may replace stopping by your manager’s office on the way out, for example.
o **Protocols** – Protocols help identify methods of communication and activities. It can be useful to lay these out and formalize them to operationalize expectations for things like scheduling and to manage online meetings, calendaring, and signaling availability, and how to give and receive information over video or conference calls.

o **Buddy System** – Each team member should have a designated colleague as their point person during an absence.

o **Evaluation of the Communication Plan** – It’s a good idea to check in frequently to see how well it is working, and how well everyone is following it. If something isn’t working well, it’s wise to acknowledge that and change the plan before the plan fails.

### Making it Work/Measuring Success

Historically, employees have been expected to devise a detailed and reliable proposal for how, where, and when work will get done. During the coronavirus crisis, when entirely remote work or hybrid arrangements have become the default for many, managers and employees must work together to create new approaches that meet mutual needs in these unusual circumstances.

#### Specifically for Managers

Managing people with flexwork requires the same skills that all managers should have. But empowering and managing remote workers and people working non-standard hours does require some extra insight. Below are some key principles that can help set you up for success.

- **Look at goals with fresh eyes**: By integrating principles of employee wellbeing into departmental goals, the sometimes unpredictable responsibilities of dependent care can be better anticipated, normalized, and accounted for in planning deliverables.

- **Manage to goals and results**: All employees should have clear goals, deliverables, and deadlines for which they are accountable, whether or not they are in your line of sight. Managers and employees should strive to discuss unexpected challenges and be willing to adjust in real-time.

- **Productivity updates can stand in for stopping by the office**: During this prolonged period of entirely remote work, it may be useful if employees send managers scheduled productivity summaries. Even a few lines noting accomplishments and status against targets can help keep both the manager and employee on track.

- **Emphasize communication**: All teams should address how they will handle communication among team members or with customers and stakeholders. With so many useful tools available, it may be helpful to keep things simple by selecting fewer tools and identifying which tools will be used for which workstreams.

For more information and support on managing remote teams, see the Center for Workplace Development’s guidance for [Managing Remotely](#).
For Employees and Managers Alike

- **Harvard work only during Harvard-paid time**: Under non-emergency circumstances, engaging in substantial non-Harvard activities – including substantial child care – is not permitted when teleworking. In our current reality, however, Harvard realizes that closed schools and disruptions of care arrangements may mean that employees must balance work with family caregiving tasks. For example, employees might plan their schedule with a realistic expectation of when they will be able to focus on work tasks without interruption and when they will need to shift their focus to providing dependent care. Harvard work still gets done on Harvard time, but the time itself is structured as a “split schedule.” This is a transparent approach to protecting time so that last-minute adjustments are minimized. Harvard’s temporarily-amended policies on use of paid time off are also intended to provide needed flexibility. Families with dependent care needs may wish to explore additional resources.

- **Safe workspace**: Employees who work remotely must maintain a physically safe workspace (see Harvard’s information on [Telework Ergonomics](#)) that is reasonably free of disruption. Employees who cannot create or sustain such a space during the coronavirus crisis are encouraged to be in touch with their local HR representative.

**Communication**

Long-term remote work requires all members of a team to continue to emphasize robust communication. Communication is everyone’s responsibility, and the team should work together to develop communication norms.

- **Maintain informal check-ins**: Strive to maintain the social nuances and spontaneity (sometimes called the “water cooler effect”) that are key to engaged teams. If informal, spontaneous check-ins are a part of your office’s culture, such as saying good morning or stopping by a cubicle to ask how a project is going, those can be translated to IMs through Teams, for example. Another way to foster connectedness is to create a 15-minute segment of a scheduled Zoom hour for coworkers to chat informally, just as they might at the beginning or end of an on-campus meeting. Limiting meeting agenda items to 20 minutes for a half-hour meeting, or 45 minutes for an hour meeting will allow time for informal conversations.

- **Schedule formal check-ins**: Make sure you have formal check-in times by scheduling and using the time even when there does not appear to be a pressing need. The converse is also true: These check-ins remain important even when everything else appears to be a pressing need.

- **Response time**: Team members should commit to responding to communications from clients and stakeholders within the same timeframe as if they were onsite unless otherwise agreed. Backup plans, such as buddy systems, are useful in the event of digital bandwidth disruptions or urgent dependent care situations.

- **Guard against signaling constant work**: Harvard has always encouraged managers to examine their own behavior and what it signals to teams: By sending emails at all hours, managers may inadvertently be sending the message that employees should check emails regularly when they are not working. During the coronavirus crisis, however, many people are forced to balance family caregiving and work responsibilities at the same time, which can have the effect of pushing work into the late evening, early morning and into weekends. Teams should, therefore, get clear about their expectations for response times. To avoid unintentional shifting of these expectations, they can consider, for example, trying email tools that schedule message delivery during normative business hours and using high/medium/low importance indicators.
• **Communicate resources to guard against stress and burnout**: Learn more about the causes and symptoms of burnout [here](#). Remind employees of available resources to foster resilience, including [mindfulness practices](#) and Harvard’s [Employee Assistance Program](#). Discussing resources with the whole team, in advance of and separate from any individual’s particular challenge, helps to de-stigmatize the use of available supports, which is an important part of encouraging others to use them.

### Measuring Success

Flexwork is successful when employers manage productivity by setting goals and timetables and defining deliverables clearly.

### Measuring the success of a flexwork arrangement

Managers and employees should consider whether:

- The quantity, quality and timeliness of work has been maintained, enhanced or diminished;
- The work arrangement has met the expectations laid out in the original proposal (if relevant);
- The work arrangement has affected, either positively or adversely, relations with the employee’s colleagues, stakeholders, students and/or customers; or
- The work arrangement has created a need for additional staff or caused a unit’s other employees to assume more work.

Now, as before, challenges along these dimensions should signal to employees and managers the need to assess working arrangements, to adjust them, or to provide additional tools or resources. While employees and managers are encouraged to approach these discussions open to the possibility of change, there will be some cases in which adjustments are not operationally feasible. In these cases, alternatives such as paid or unpaid time off should be considered.

### Trial periods

In less unpredictable circumstances, when employees propose flexwork, all arrangements should begin with a trial period and reviewed in 30 days to ensure they are meeting business needs. Trial periods can be extended, and adjustments made as needed. They should be revisited at regular intervals thereafter (e.g., during annual performance reviews) and modified as necessary. Even during the coronavirus crisis, employees may propose adjustments to their on-campus status or their work hours. In these cases, managers and employees are still encouraged to consider a trial period to make sure business needs are met.

### Additional Resources

Managers and employees alike can call on these additional resources:

- Flexwork [Tools and Resources page](#)
- Local Human Resources offices
- Harvard’s [Employee Assistance Program](#), which features a wide range of support services for individuals and also offers management consultations for supervisors.
Proposing and Documenting Flexwork

In the past, the University has required employees seeking flexwork arrangements to submit a written proposal addressing where, when and how the work will get done. Due to the pandemic, many employees found themselves working remotely on very short notice. Not only was there little time to prepare, but the University’s formal proposal process was not entirely applicable when the paradigm was inverted in this way, and employees were directed – rather than requesting themselves – to work remotely.

As circumstances evolve, either challenges or operational opportunities may lead an employee to propose an adjustment to their schedule or their place of work. For those instances, the proposal process remains useful. Employees who wish to formalize a request for adjusted hours or a change to campus presence may follow the proposal process using the newly revised flexwork form. As always, managers must consider all proposals and follow an equitable process for evaluating them. And as always, an equitable process does not necessarily mean an identical outcome.

For employees who are currently working remotely and do not wish to propose a formal change to that arrangement, there is still value to the process of developing a thoughtful plan of how, when and where job responsibilities will be accomplished. However long these arrangements last, it is useful to be proactive in defining the approach. The flexwork form allows for this process as well.

Using the Form to Support a Thoughtful Process

Whether you are proposing a new or adjusted flexwork arrangement or defining an existing one, you can use a single form. The revised form is not one-size-fits-all and includes optional sections. And the form doesn’t stand alone. Many managers prefer that the process begins with an employee-supervisor conversation, which is then followed by additional conversations to ensure alignment and mutual understanding once the proposal has been approved. Some managers choose not to require the form at all. However formally the form is used, it is designed to provide a foundation for best practices and common-sense decisions. It can:

- **Empower employees** to think through and develop specific flexwork proposals, identify approaches to balancing dependent-care responsibilities with work, and define methods to evaluate these approaches;
- **Guide managers** in evaluating flexwork proposals fairly;
- **Ensure an equitable evaluation process** 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; and
- **Serve as a basis for ongoing conversations** among employees, managers and teams.
For Employees: Creating a Proposal

Some employees have been working flexibly for several years, and for others, it is very new. Few have worked entirely remotely, however, so this process can be helpful both in assessing current arrangements and beginning new ones. The following steps are intended to empower employees as they seek to redesign their work experience and fulfill multiple obligations. Employees and managers may follow these steps in ways that make the most sense for them and their teams:

- **Review the definitions** of the various components of flexwork and the six principles of flexwork at Harvard.
- **Download the flexwork form** and use it as a guide for your own thought process.
- **Refer to your contract** to review any flexibility provisions, if you are a member of a union. If there is a conflict between the language in one of Harvard’s union contracts and these flexwork guidelines, the union contract language prevails.
- **Address how, when and where work will get done.** Under optimal conditions, once approved and implemented, flexwork should have either a net-positive or net-neutral effect on business results and the work environment. In other words, the same work is getting accomplished at another time, in another place or in another way, and it is having a positive effect or mixed effects that, on balance, are not considered to have a negative impact on the team or work. Your proposal should address the potential impacts on teammates, customers, and other stakeholders.

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**When Health May be at Issue**

If you are seeking a flexwork arrangement to manage a health 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 Resources (UDR) 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 met.

Previously, Harvard’s flexwork guidelines emphasized that the manager should not ask about an individual’s personal circumstances or base their approval or denial of a flexwork arrangement on the employee’s reason for the request. The principle of respecting an employee’s privacy and evaluating a proposal on its business merits holds true during the COVID-19 crisis. The uncertainty of child care, schools and elder care services mean, however, that some employees must balance work and family responsibilities in ways that bring these issues to the forefront to a new degree. Managers are encouraged to work with their employees to find pragmatic ways to accomplish job responsibilities, along with personal responsibilities, whenever possible. Framing this as a mutual responsibility to address important demands on both sides of the employer-employee equation will encourage honest and practical conversations. It is wise to touch base with local HR to ensure that new arrangements make sense in the context of local policies and practices.

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.

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., you believe that school is more important than training for a marathon), it’s critical to avoid pitting one employee’s values against another’s.

Prior to the public health emergency, it was easier to focus only on the realm of workplace needs and work performance goals and doing so means that managers were less likely to be put in a position to arbitrate worthiness.

Now, however, conversations about personal reasons for seeking flexibility are taking on many new dimensions. External forces such as the need for physical distance and the breakdown of social infrastructure have led to shared “reasons” for flexibility and new motivation for cooperation and understanding. Approaching all conversations about flexibility with respect, sensitivity, and pragmatism can support the success of a single employee and the team as a whole.
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 (unless otherwise directed by the University or their individual School).

Employees wishing to propose a change to their department’s standard arrangement are encouraged to develop written proposals, but managers may wish to bookend or even replace the proposal with conversations. You might begin by setting expectations on the individual or team level about the proposal process. It is ultimately the manager’s decision to require, approve or decline a proposal. If a proposal is declined, however, you should provide a business reason for your decision.

It’s always wise to touch base with local HR to make sure that the proposed arrangement makes sense in the context of local policies and practices, but this is especially important during the public-health emergency.

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. Flexwork 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 arrangements, you may want to 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 AM to 5 PM.
  - Everyone must attend Tuesday afternoon Zoom 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.
  - A “buddy system” must be established to ensure that an employee who was unable to attend a meeting receives critical information that was conveyed there.
  - Exempt employees who are working a compressed workweek 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 times 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 AM and 2 PM, or every Thursday for a staff meeting). They may also want to establish the outer boundaries of the hours during which anyone may work in the office (for example, no earlier than 7 AM or later than 7 PM). Once managers establish their principles, they can determine the hours that need to be covered. Remember that employees thrive when they have appropriate 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.
**Note:** In response to the pandemic, units and departments have been encouraged to reconsider the boundaries of the workday and workweek. Split schedules may be necessary, for example, for people balancing dependent care responsibilities. At the same time, unconventional work times within teams may prove mutually beneficial to working partners with similarly unconventional personal schedules. Such complementary arrangements should be voluntary, so as not to impose unreasonable working conditions on those who will function better during more traditional working hours.

- **Consider each employee’s proposal:** 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? 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 to bring up concerns, make adjustments and find innovative solutions among the group. For example, one employee who wants to work from 7 AM to 3 PM may leave the unit with an afternoon gap, until another employee points out that she would be just as happy to work from 10 AM to 6 PM. It may not be possible to stay completely in sync during these times, but team conversations can go a long way toward heading off unintended negative consequences.

- **Approve or deny based on business reasons:** Proposals, written or not, are expected to explain in detail how the proposed arrangement will support a department’s business goals and objectives. Managers should assess whether a proposal will have a net-neutral or net positive effect. 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. Managers should keep an open mind regarding flexwork, but not agree to changes that could undermine business goals or burden other staff.

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**If Health Issues Emerge**

If issues of health or disability are directly stated or appear to emerge during conversations with an employee about flexibility, you should touch base 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 Resources (UDR) website to learn more about reasonable accommodations.
For Employees and Managers: When a Proposal is Not Approved

Managers should give concrete feedback about why a proposal is 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 flexwork. 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.

- These guidelines may be updated from time to time. To be sure you are referring to the most recent version, please visit here.
- These guidelines are just the beginning! For more detailed information and to drill down on specific topics, please see Flexwork Tools and Resources, online.