Harvard's Telework Continuity Tool Kit

Sustaining business continuity in a time of disruption

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Using Telework During the Coronavirus Crisis

In light of concerns about coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, departments, and units across Harvard are raising questions about how to implement telework under these circumstances. This document contains basic principles and best practices that will support successful telework practices under normal conditions and is designed to guide employees and managers through the implementation of telework now. In it, you will find highlighted resources that can support teams' decision-making processes, and it notes places to abbreviate or modify best practices:

- While the principles that govern the University's guidelines emphasize the need for a **written proposal**, this sometimes lengthy process can be abbreviated or eliminated.
- Under emergency conditions, departments and units may choose to modify the proposal process, focusing instead on developing a **communications plan** that supports business continuity.
- The guidelines stress the importance of maintaining the social connections that are often important to successful teams. Social distancing measures make this challenging. Try thinking about it this way: what we need now is **physical spacing and social connectivity.**
- The Get Ready to Work Remotely site provides **HUIT's quick-start introduction** to the tools and resources you'll need for productive remote work, including information security requirements for your personal devices.
    - All employees must still 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.
- Under non-emergency circumstances, engaging in substantial non-Harvard activities is not permitted when teleworking. In the case of a viral outbreak, however, closed schools and disruptions of care arrangements may mean that employees must **balance family caregiving tasks with work tasks**.

To understand how Harvard has enhanced its paid time off benefits and amended other workplace policies, read about Harvard's newly enhanced Coronavirus Workplace Policies.

This toolkit also references the work of one of the leaders in the field of flexible work arrangements, Cali Yost. Cali is the CEO and Founder of Flex+Strategy Group, a strategy consulting firm that helps organizations implement cultures of high-performance flexibility. With her approval, "Tips from Cali" have been specially curated to support you in your efforts.

Please explore the complete flex guidelines and tools to help you and your teams understand best practices in telework, and from there, use common sense, creativity, and a spirit of goodwill to design new ways of working for tough times, great times, and everything in between.

Looking at Jobs in a New Way

It is important to remember that there are some jobs for which telework is not feasible. During this emergency, other jobs and tasks that have been unsuitable for telework should be reassessed with the goal of adapting them to be performed remotely and digitally to the extent possible.

> **Tip from Cali: Map out jobs and tasks that could be affected. Note which roles and duties:**
>
> 1. Can be done, even partially, without a physical presence in the workplace
>
> 2. Cannot be done, even somewhat, outside of the physical premises and
>
> 3. Not sure. Challenge any potentially inaccurate default assumptions about specific jobs you may have thought couldn't be done remotely. And for those in the "not sure" column, be willing to experiment.

Looking at Harvard's Flexwork Guidelines in a New Way

Many units have established best practices for telework since the University-wide Flexwork Guidelines were re-introduced in 2017. Some groups may find themselves pivoting quite quickly to telework, and the guidelines will help them understand the foundational principles of successful telework.

During this period of disruption, some of the flex guidelines' best practices may be relaxed or modified to enable the rapid adoption of telework in the service of continued operations and social distancing requirements.

As noted above, engaging in substantial non-Harvard activities while teleworking was previously prohibited. At this time, however, closed schools and disruptions of care arrangements may mean that employees must **balance family caregiving tasks with work tasks**. Employees and supervisors are encouraged to communicate about their circumstances and to use both common sense and empathy when it comes to working around them.

Please explore the complete flex guidelines and tools to help you and your teams understand best practices in telework, and from there, use creativity and a spirit of goodwill to design new ways of working for tough times, great times, and everything in between.

Using the Flexwork Tools and Resources Guide

The Flexwork Tools and Resources Guide provides several documents to help managers lead successful distributed teams. The guidelines in full are included for your information when typical operations resume. For now, the guidelines have been modified and simplified (e.g., we

are not requiring a form to be completed to request a flex arrangement) to ease the implementation of telework. Some of the more helpful tools during this time are highlighted below.

Leaders, managers, and supervisors who have not led a distributed team might need some help [Managing and Measuring Flexwork](). Please keep in mind that during challenging times, best practices may be relaxed or modified to enable the rapid adoption of telework in the service of continued operations.

Leaders will need to conduct meetings using various technologies. [Tips on Leading a Meeting with Remote Participants]() can help you ensure success during team meetings.

It is just as important that the participants in virtual meetings understand proper etiquette. [Tips for Participating Remotely in a Call or Web Meeting]() provide useful information to help virtual meetings run smoothly.

> **Tip from Cali: Identify tasks/meetings that can be handled virtually without disruption and execute as many logistical changes as possible (e.g., lining up technology and updating meeting invites).** Even if you have never done a meeting or event virtually via webinar or video chat, try it. Set it up as an experiment, so expectations are managed. Schedule a 10-minute log-on buffer before each meeting starts. This allows everyone to be signed on and ready to go when the meeting begins.

Leaders will be asked to work with their teams to think "outside of the box" to ensure successful outcomes.

Taking a New Approach to the Flexwork Proposal Form

The [Flexwork Proposal Form]() is a tool for addressing a range of considerations related to performing jobs at alternative locations or times, and it guides a comprehensive conversation between employees and managers. During normal operations, the form is recommended for proposing ongoing arrangements.

At this time, managers are encouraged to omit it so that the implementation of telework is not delayed.

Elements of Business Continuity When Working Remotely

Communication is key. Leaders and employees should discuss these elements as they see fit. Setting expectations builds trust and understanding while we all work to balance life and work during this time.

- Where, when and how job requirements and performance objectives will be accomplished
- Communication practices
- Equipment needed for success
- Information security requirements
- Challenges and solutions
- Evaluation metrics
- Schedules
- Balancing caregiving duties with work
- Accounting for time.

Implementation of Telework Without a Trial Period

During this period, do not be bound by the guidelines' recommendation of a 30-day trial period. Telework at a large scale is new for all of us, and we will be learning as we go about how to be successful when working remotely. So in effect, every day is a trial period.

Creating a Team Communications Plan is the Top Priority

It's helpful to set expectations by developing a Team Communication Plan.

- **Communication Goals –** establish 2-4 agreed-upon goals on the use of e-mails and IMs, setting expectations, contact information, and developing teams' preferences.

- **Formal and Informal Communication Methods –** Define how team meetings, one-on-one leader meetings, e-mail, instant messages, team newsletters, and other forms of communications will be used during this period.

- **Expectations of Each Other –**The team should collaborate and agree on timelines, deadlines, accountability, handling issues, and managing conflict. Managers can direct conversations to include their expectations as well.

- **Protocols –** Protocols help identify methods of communication and activities. They operationalize expectations for things like calling and managing online meetings, calendaring and signaling availability, and how to give and receive information.

- **Buddy System –** Each team member should have a buddy to cover for them and communicate developments and news during an absence.

- **Evaluation of the Communication Plan –** It's wise to check in weekly to see how well it is working, and how everyone is following it.

  Tip from Cali: Don't be afraid to interrupt each other! This is the toughest social norm to break with remote work. If you can't see someone, then it feels like they

aren't working, so you don't want to "bother" them. WE ARE ALL WORKING.
Chat, call, ping each other. Regularly. You'll figure out a new rhythm.

Maintaining Social Connections

The guidelines stress the importance of maintaining the social connections that are often important to successful teams. How will you maintain the informal relationships that provide support during a time of significant stress?

You might consider regular all-hands meetings using online conferencing and collaboration tools, with senior leaders providing a department-specific view of how they are re-ordering priorities and re-conceptualizing successful outcomes. At the same time, things are not "business as usual."

Remember to remain generous with others as you all learn new ways of working in a challenging time. People will make mistakes. Technology won't work as planned. You will all learn the "etiquette" of collaborating over distance and through new media as you go along.

> **Tip from Cali: Expect and Forgive Imperfect Workspaces and Background Activity**
> Establish that it's okay to be responsive and accessible regardless of what's happening around you in your remote work environment. You can explain what's going on. During this time, everyone will understand. It will be especially important as local schools close and children are home.

Teams can find information and resources for a range of easy-to-use collaboration tools through HUIT, which serves FAS and Central Administration. You can find more information on this IT Help page. Local IT can provide tools, information, and guidance at other Harvard "tubs."

Assessing Technology, Safety, and Proficiency

Employees with job responsibilities that can be effectively accomplished from home by telecommuting should make sure now that they are prepared for the possibility of teleworking more days per week than they do presently, or entirely, and possibly for a protracted period.

This may entail getting encryption and Virtual Private Network (VPN) access to Harvard servers for University-owned laptops, or simpler measures such as confirming remote access to Harvard voicemail and e-mail.

Some of the more helpful tools during this disruptive time are highlighted below.

- Start with HUIT's Preparing to Work Remotely PDF for tips to ensure success.
- If you are planning on using your own equipment while teleworking, the Personal Device

Security Guide is an essential resource to reference.

- The Secure Configuration Options document offers approaches to three remote access options.

- During this time of disruption, we are especially vulnerable to cybercrime and phishing. Please review the Information Security Policy to ensure you are handling your work appropriately. And because Zoom is becoming a new area of security concern, be sure to refer to these new Zoom security practices as well.

- Safety doesn't just apply to information. Our sudden shift to telework presents unique ergonomic challenges to physical safety, too. Many people have makeshift home workstations that don't support the neutral postures necessary to work in a physically safe and sustainable way. See the new Telecommuting Ergonomics tip sheet to help you settle in to your home office for both the short term and the long run.

Managing at a Distance

Leaders, managers, and supervisors who have not led a distributed team will find tips about Managing and Measuring Flexwork in our Flexwork Tools and Resources Guide. Again, remember that during challenging times, best practices may be relaxed or modified to enable the rapid adoption of telework in the service of social distancing and continued operations. Whether goals stay the same or get re-prioritized, clarity around these goals will help anchor people in doing their best work.

> **Tip from Cali: Continually prioritize and check-in.** Once initial priorities are set, schedule regular periods each week to review work (and to touch base personally), one-on-one and as a team. Re-prioritize as needed based on those discussions. Check-ins can help to replicate the organic social interaction that most everyone will miss.

Imagining the Future

Harvard has existed since 1636, and will continue in its mission both throughout this period and after. As we reimagine how we work, we will discover new practices and habits, gifts, and challenges, and we will experience profoundly the importance of the human connections that support us as we strive for excellence in all that we do.

> **Tip from Cali: Identify ways to measure performance.** After this period is over, this data will allow you to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and why. The data will also prepare you in advance to answer the inevitable question once this challenging period has passed, "Why don't we do this all the time?" Depending upon the outcomes, you may decide to continue certain aspects of the flexible

response permanently. For example, perhaps you cut business travel by 25% and substituted video conferencing. You determine afterward that about 80% of those meetings were equally as effective virtually. Therefore, a 20% decrease in business travel will continue, but this time as part of the organization's sustainability strategy to cut carbon emissions.

So prepare for excellence. Keep track of what works and what doesn't. Note the improvised shifts that might lead to more permanent improvements. We are in a learning environment. Let's learn together.

University Resources

The SOURCE Program
SOURCE (Subsidy for Occasional, Unplanned, and Respite Care Expenses) Program is a reimbursement program that helps income-eligible employees work when child or adult care is unavailable. Learn more at the Source Program's page on HARVie.

The WATCH Portal
WATCH (Web Access to Care at Harvard) online portal connects faculty, staff, and student parents with Harvard students and affiliates who want to provide long and short-term child care, including occasional babysitting. Learn more at the WATCH Portal's page.

Harvard's Employee Assistance Program
Harvard's EAP is provided by KGA and has counselors available 24/7 to help. **Note: KGA is now offering both telehealth counseling and chat options.** KGA can also assist in identifying local care providers to meet back-up care needs. Register on their website for articles, resources, tools, and training programs. The EAP is just a phone call away: 877-327-4278 (877-EAP-HARV).

Care@Work
Benefits-eligible faculty and staff have access to pre-vetted back-up care, senior care advising, and the Care.com digital platform with thousands of resources for self-directed searches. Learn more about what the program offers on the Care@Work HARVie page. Note: You must register in advance to use their services; when you do, you will have access to new protocols and requirements regarding in-home back-up care to protect everyone's health during the coronavirus outbreak.

Mindfulness at Work
Harvard University provides a variety of mindfulness meditation classes throughout the year. Benefits of meditation include increases in concentration, productivity, physical and psychological resilience, and the ability to respond skillfully to stressful situations. Meditation is also effective in decreasing depression, physical pain, emotional reactivity, and reliance on unhealthy coping behaviors.

Note: The spring mindfulness programming has been moved from in-person classes to virtual sessions available remotely via Zoom. Benefits-eligible faculty and staff can sign up in the training portal for these sessions. Current enrollees will receive information regarding this change along with the link to register to access the class using Zoom. You can find more information on the [Mindfulness page on HARVie](#).