

MANAGING AND MEASURING FLEX

While flexing hours (such as working 7:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.) is one of the most popular form of flexwork at Harvard, there is continuing and growing interest in telecommuting and remote work, whether occasional or on a formal basis. Managing people with flexwork requires the same skills that all managers must have. But managing telecommuters and remote workers does require some extra insight.

Below are some key principles that can help set you up for success:

Manage to goals and results

- All employees should have clear goals, deliverables, and deadlines for which he or she is accountable, whether or not in your line of sight.
- As someone begins teleworking, it can be useful if the employee sends you scheduled productivity summaries: Even a few lines noting accomplishments and status against targets can help keep you both on track.

Understand unit-specific approaches

- No two units are alike. Labs and libraries have different demands than do office settings. Think about whether and what approach might work for your unit's business needs.
- There are jobs that cannot be performed from an alternate location (e.g., serving meals, parking cars, in-person customer service, counseling, animal care or patient care, work that involves certain kinds of high-risk confidential information).

Make expectations clear

- All arrangements should have a defined trial period – thirty days is common.
- Teleworkers should be flexible with their flexibility, and willing to come on-site for work-related meetings and events that are scheduled on a day that is otherwise designated as a telework day.
- All arrangements should address whether and how communications among team members or with customers and stakeholders might change under the proposed arrangement.
- Costs for home office set-up will generally be the responsibility of the employees, except for situations when working from home is a management request. Employees must provide all suitable work tools for a home office, such as high-speed internet, equipment, furnishings, etc. Employees are expected to ensure their home office set up is ergonomic and they manage to the privacy requirements set forth by their department and the University.

Set the non-negotiable terms of telework

- Employees must engage only in Harvard work; no other substantial work – such as child care or personal projects – should be conducted during agreed-upon work times.
- At a minimum, team members should commit to responding to communications from colleagues and clients within the same timeframe as if they were on-site, unless otherwise agreed.
- Employees who telework—even occasionally—must provide and maintain a physically safe workspace that is reasonably free of disruption.
- Meetings and other in-office activities do not need to be scheduled around a teleworker's scheduled office presence (unless there is a business-related reason for protecting that teleworker's time).

Check in with colleagues and customers (internal and external)

Regular check-ins with colleagues and customers—beginning in the trial period and at a minimum during the annual performance review—provide important information that may lead to tweaks or more alterations in the flexwork arrangement to ensure their success.



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Pay attention to team success

- Ensure transparency about arrangements to protect against misunderstandings or the impression of favoritism or unfair treatment.
- Strive to maintain the social nuances and spontaneity (sometimes called the “water cooler effect”) that are key to engaged teams. Managers might consider inexpensive webcams for all office-based employees to enable geographically separated employees to collaborate more easily via Skype, Facetime, Zoom or other approved technologies—regardless of their own flexwork arrangements.
- Innovation does not emerge just because of physical presence

Maintain both formal and informal check-ins and communications

- Make sure you have formal check-in times by scheduling the time.
- 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, which are typically part of videoconferencing software like Skype.
- Never succumb to the idea that a colleague shouldn’t be “bothered unnecessarily” when teleworking, unless that time is explicitly designated as do not disturbed for concentrated work.

Develop communication norms

- Agree upon one or more approved communication tools for use amongst colleagues (e.g., cell phone, forwarding office line to home telephone, Skype for Business, Harvard email, etc.). Learn more about Harvard’s collaboration tools [here](#).
- Examine your own behavior and what it signals to your teams. Do you send emails at late hours? Be clear about your expectations for when both exempt and overtime-eligible employees respond to you—they may feel obligated to check emails regularly when they are not working *just in case*. You may prefer to have an after-hours policy that requires a telephone call for something that is time-sensitive, thereby freeing everyone from the “sleeping with your smartphone” phenomenon. Try email tools to schedule a delayed and more normative morning message delivery.

Even with telework, there are times when face-to-face has its place

- Meetings that require many participants.
- Meetings that require shared visual focus that can’t easily be translated to telephone or web conferencing.
- Difficult or complex conversations that would benefit by minimizing the relational gap by closing the physical gap.
- Collective schedule planning around foreseeable changes (vacations, parental leaves, a partner’s surgery).
- Team celebrations.



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Additional Considerations for Remote Workers

If your unit deals with or is considering establishing work outside of Massachusetts, please refer to the job considerations grid which provides an overview of factors to consider when evaluating a specific position's suitability for a FWA.

Policies on Remote Location Establishment and **Eligibility for Harvard Payroll and Outsourced Payrolls** may also be relevant to your consideration of remote work proposals.

Measuring Success, Making Adjustments

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

When 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.
- The work arrangement has affected, either positively or adversely, relations with the employee's colleagues, stakeholders, students and/or customers.
- The work arrangement has created a need for additional staff, or caused a unit's other employees to assume more work.
- An employee has continued to comply with all University and department rules, policies and practices.

Following a review, a manager and employee may decide to extend the arrangement, make adjustments or end it. If a manager determines that an employee should end an agreement, that manager should provide as much notice as is practicable before implementing the change.

- Remember that while flexwork is not an entitlement, many employees will make certain personal decisions based on the structure of their work responsibilities. Conversations about possible changes will help employees prepare and plan accordingly.

Valuable insights into opportunities for larger process improvements often emerge during the assessment of a flexwork arrangement.

