

Remote Work during COVID-19

Wright State University is committed to safely and effectively meeting the public health challenge presented by COVID-19. This extends to ensuring, where possible, that university employees can work from home or another remote location whenever necessary in the coming weeks. Working remotely (a Flexible Work Arrangement) is not new, but because employees may be unfamiliar with them and managers may not have encountered the use of these yet, this resource was developed to help you and your team navigate potential remote work scenarios.

Included in these new resource pages, you will find guidance for supervisors, employees, and departments designed to help set up temporary remote work quickly and successfully.

What is “remote work?”

Remote work is a work arrangement in which some or all of the work is performed from home or another off-site location. In general, regular office hours are worked and deviations from that schedule require supervisor approval.

Which jobs are suited for remote work?

Remote work is easiest to implement for jobs or tasks that require reading, writing, research, working with data, and talking on the phone. In general, and at management’s discretion, a job is suited to remote work if the job or some components of it can be done off-site without disruption to the flow of work and communication.

Which jobs are not as well suited for remote work?

It is not uncommon to require employees to work on-site if their positions require in-person contact/customer service or their work relies on specific equipment, supplies or work location. Management and/or supervisory roles also generally may be excluded from consideration for remote work arrangements unless a department finds such an arrangement practical in meeting job responsibilities. Some jobs that may not seem appropriate at first may be temporarily modified so that employees can work remotely.

What are the most important considerations in starting a productive remote work arrangement?

When clearly outlined and executed, remote work arrangements can prove beneficial to employees and managers alike. Managers should articulate clear procedures regarding check-in times and hours of availability. With proper planning, communications problems can be minimized. Indeed, well-planned flexible work arrangements sometimes enable departments to extend their service hours, and to make more effective use of space and equipment.

Supervisor checklist for supporting remote work

Remote work arrangements work best when employees and supervisors communicate clearly about expectations. The following checklist will help you establish a foundation for effective teamwork, continued productivity, and service to the Wright State University community.

Understand relevant guidelines and expectations. Review the detailed guidelines and expectations as outlined in the [Flexible Work Arrangement Guidelines](#) available on human resources' website. Supervisors should verify that their employees have read and understood this information.

Review technology needs and resources. Identify the technology tools that staff use in their daily work and determine whether the resources will be accessible when working from home. Also ensure that employees know how to access your team's local CaTS support should they need assistance.

Review work schedules. Remote work sometimes gets confused with "flex work." Be clear about your expectations with employees for maintaining their current work schedule or what your expectations are if you are open to flexible scheduling based on employee needs.

Draft a work plan. Review the questions below with staff and work through answers together.

- What routine responsibilities/tasks cannot be fulfilled while working remotely and how will it impact operations or other people? What are ways to reduce those impacts?
- What routine responsibilities/tasks require regular communication and collaboration with others? Proactively contact each colleague to confirm how you will communicate while everyone is working remotely.
- Oftentimes employees experience fewer interruptions while working remotely. Are there any special projects or tasks that you can advance while working under such an arrangement?
- What events or meetings are scheduled during the time in which the temporary remote working arrangement is in place? Will they be postponed or canceled, or will they take place using technology? What follow-up needs to occur due to postponements or cancellations?

Make a communication and accountability plan. Supervisors should tell employees how often they should send updates on work plan progress and what those updates should include. Supervisors should also communicate how quickly they expect the employee to respond and the best ways for the employee to contact the supervisor while working remotely.

- If you normally make daily rounds to visit employees at their desks, you can give them a call during this period. Maintain team meetings and one-to-one check-ins, altering the schedule if needed to accommodate any alternative schedules that have been approved.
- **Conduct regular check-ins.** For example, start each workday with a phone, video, or instant message chat. Your employees will be eager for connection and information during the disruption and the structure will help everyone create a positive routine. Every other day or weekly may be fine, so long as you are in contact frequently enough that your employees are in sync with you and/or with one another.

Be positive. A positive attitude toward working remotely and a willingness to trust employees to work effectively is key to making such arrangements successful and productive. Remote work presents an opportunity for managers to become better supervisors. Instead of focusing on how many hours your employees are working, re-emphasize a focus on measuring results and reaching objectives—regardless of work arrangement. The employee’s completed work product is the indicator of success, rather than direct observation. By focusing on the employee’s work product, managers of remote employees will improve their organizational abilities and their own skill in managing by objectives.

Debrief after normal operations resume. Employees and supervisors should review work plans when work returns to normal, assess progress on the employee’s work plan and prioritize any unresolved or new work that resulted from temporary operational disruption.

Tips for departments with widespread remote work

With many teams moving to these arrangements quickly, departments may want to adapt the following suggestions:

1. Consider designating a remote work task force. Depending on the size of your unit, consider implementing a task force to manage protocols and procedures for your department.

2. Engage your team. Setting up a group to work remotely is different than setting up an individual employee to do so. Effective remote teamwork requires entire units to embrace technology and proactive communication in ways that may be new and challenging to traditional ways of working. Support the success of your team by:

- Scheduling a conversation about what it would look like for your team to go remote.
- Identify needs and tool preferences of team members for remote work.
- Document and share remote work practices/plans.

3. Enable and encourage ongoing communication. Ongoing communication is the most important part of effective remote teamwork. Working online can be isolating without regular contact with supervisors and colleagues. By creating the expectation that an entire team will communicate regularly with one another, members will feel connected regardless of where they are.

Remote working tips for employees

Employees who work remotely often learn that it is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following tips will help you get to work while at home.

1. Define your workspace. It can be easy to sit on the sofa with your laptop and expect to get work done. Experienced remote workers will tell you they tried that and it simply doesn't work! We are creatures of habit and most of us are used to lounging with our laptops to read the news, watch TV, play games, and chat with friends and family. Establishing a workspace, even if it is your kitchen table, gives your brain a cue that it is time for work and not play.

2. Master the basics.

- Add your schedule to your email signature line.
- Assure that you know how to [access your voicemail from home](#).
- Know how to use [OneDrive for Business](#), a Microsoft online service that provides resources for file storage, collaboration, and communication within Wright State's Office 365 system.
- Use [Skype](#) for instant messaging or [WebEx](#) for web meetings to stay connected to colleagues. Consider using [Microsoft Teams](#), which brings together people, conversations, and content -- along with the tools that teams need -- so they can collaborate. You will need to make a request for a 'TEAM' to setup through the CaTS Help Desk. Email the Help Desk at helpdesk@wright.edu or call (937) 775-4827 or 1-888-775-4827.
- Plan for video calls/meetings by making sure you know how to turn on your computer's camera and microphone and being aware that your colleagues may be able to see the background behind you.

3. Set daily goals, track them, and share your progress. You may be surprised by how differently the work day passes without the comings and goings of an office to break things up or influence what you do next. Start each day of remote work by writing down what you need to achieve and then track your progress. Pay attention to how long tasks take you and start adjusting your daily goals to match your current rhythm. Communicate with your supervisor and/or colleagues if you think your plan needs to be adjusted.

4. Eliminate distractions. If home is where your heart is then remote work can mean pets, children, or a favorite hobby are only a few feet away. Depending on your living arrangement, you may need to hang a "do not disturb" sign so your family members don't interrupt you. Pets often need a closed door to keep them away and you might need headphones to block the neighborhood noise.

5. Prioritize privacy. Whether you are in your home or a common area, take five minutes to assess the privacy of your workspace. Can someone standing behind you

read your computer screen? Are your windows open so your neighbor can hear your phone call? What information do you need to secure before grabbing a cup of coffee or heading to the restroom? Your personal privacy matters too. Check to see if there is anything around you that would not want visible during a video conference with your boss or colleagues.

6. Stay connected. Many people say they do not call or instant message colleagues who are working remotely because they don't want to bother them. Remember, they are working, not vacationing at home! You should feel confident about calling or messaging an employee who is working remotely any time you would walk to their office or call them if they were working on-site. You can even keep your daily coffee run – simply plan to call or video chat with a cup in hand at the time your crew would normally walk to your favorite espresso cart.

7. Dress for work. Just like sitting on the couch can make us feel a little too relaxed, wearing pajamas all day makes it hard to get into work mode. Dressing casually is definitely a perk of working at home but getting “ready for work” is a daily ritual that many remote workers swear by.