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School of Communication and Information

Department Needs Assessment and Team Agreement
for the FlexWork@RU Pilot
September 1, 2022 through August 31, 2023

Adopted 7/25/2022
Updated 7/12/2023

Background and Context

During 2019-20, the staff and administration of the School of Communication and Information worked together to develop policies and practices for telecommuting in alignment with university policies in existence at that time. The plan was adopted in January 2020. Two months later, all staff became fully remote because of the Covid pandemic. Most worked fully remotely for one year and then worked hybrid (three days of telecommuting per week) for a year.

We are proud of our work during the Covid pandemic. We have demonstrated as a school and as individuals our deep commitment to excellence in fulfilling the mission of the school, enabling our students, faculty, and staff to meet individual goals within a supportive and effective environment. Through this team agreement, we reconfirm this commitment.

Given (1) the shared understanding that resulted from our development of a school telecommuting policy, (2) two years of experience with large-scale telecommuting, (3) our significant computing infrastructure, and (4) the strong technology skills of our staff, SC&I is well positioned to participate in the FlexWork@RU pilot program during 2022-23.

Principles and practices for the pilot

The majority of principles and practices outlined in our pre-Covid telecommuting policy (e.g., requirements of the alternate work location) are still relevant and useful for the FlexWork pilot and most will not be re-stated in this agreement. That policy is posted on our website. Where the policy conflicts with newer university policies, obviously the university regulations will be observed. SC&I commits to conducting school-wide discussions to update our document in the coming year in light of what we have learned from the pandemic telecommuting experience and new university guidelines.

Each staff position in the school is individually assessed in terms of eligibility to apply to participate in the FlexWork pilot. The pilot requires that anyone who telecommutes must work on campus a minimum of three days in a typical week. Individuals who are approved for telecommuting may choose not to telecommute at all or to work on campus more than three days per week, as several staff do. Note that while the university policy allows for the possibility of approval for more than two days of telecommuting each week, they have made it clear that those requests can only be approved under extraordinary circumstances.

Telecommuting assumes staff work their normal hours from the alternate work location. Individuals who want to request to work different sets of hours from their standard workweek need to apply for that

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separately. (If the reason for making the request has to do with accommodations for a disability or temporary health problem, employees need to apply through the appropriate accommodations requests process.)

The supervisor of each work group will be responsible for coordinating the schedules of team members to assure that the functional area is staffed on campus five days a week during the regular workweek, Monday through Friday. Individuals who do not work in teams may be asked to coordinate with others. It seems worthwhile for each staff member to have one day in the office that their supervisor is in the office as well. In scheduling, we will continue to be mindful of both staff safety/density within spaces and the need to support our active classroom and co-curricular environment on campus.

Ad hoc changes to people's schedules will be made to address vacations, illness, and personal emergencies. People who are too ill to work should be in touch with their supervisor about taking a sick day, regardless of whether they were scheduled to work on campus or remotely. Someone whose illness is such that they can work but should not work near others can discuss a change of schedule to work remotely while contagious. People whose young or elderly dependent or pet requires their attention during the workday should take sick time to address those needs regardless of whether they were scheduled to work on campus or remotely. There may also be times that based on the responsibilities of the job, a staff member needs to work on campus on a day they normally work remotely. When these unusual situations occur, individuals will be notified as much in advance as possible.

From the experience of the pandemic, we have seen benefits to working in each mode, remotely and on campus. Remote work gives more opportunity for focused time, and it enables people to participate in more collaborations by making it simpler to interact with a range of people who are dispersed. Campus work allows for interactions among a wider range of people, which supports a dynamic, community-friendly workplace and closer personal relationships. It also provides access to equipment, supplies, and facilities not available in most homes. All staff should work with their supervisor or team leader to optimize the benefits of each mode of work as they create weekly schedules. At this time the school is not requiring that everyone be on campus one day together, but reserves the right to implement such a plan later in the year if it seems worthwhile. Each supervisor and team may determine if there should be one day when all of them are on campus together to advance their work.

We strive to maintain a welcoming, respectful, and effective work environment where everyone's contribution is valued. Achieving this goal requires the participation of every member of the SC&I community: treating others as valuable colleagues and behaving oneself in a way that garners respect. We recognize that supervision and supporting cohesive teams in a hybrid work structure requires evolving management and organizational strategies. We are committed to exploring and implementing ways of working that will assure the success of the FlexWork pilot plan. A risk of remote work is that some people may become invisible to others, especially those outside their immediate work group. Each of us will strive to reach out to colleagues to assure a sense of community within the school. It is also the obligation of each of us to put in the effort to remain visible when working remotely.

During remote meetings, the standard is that all cameras are on. Because alternate work locations are supposed to be places where we can work professionally, this should be easily possible.

Each supervisor will assure that every employee who is overtime-eligible maintains a record of their time at work. As is university policy, any overtime to be worked must be approved in advance, and that is equally

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true of remote work. It is a best practice for everyone, regardless of overtime eligibility, to track their time working.

During Covid, different employees addressed their personal and professional technology situations in various ways:
- Some owned up-to-date home computers, monitors, and printers which they used successfully.
- SC&I lent computer equipment to some staff whose home systems were not sufficient to enable successful remote work.
- Some staff whose work takes them to multiple locations worked from school-provided laptops.
- Some staff needed to upgrade their home Internet connections in order to be able to telecommute.
- During fully remote work, some staff took home components from their campus offices such as monitors.

As we move towards a more permanent telecommuting situation, we will review our current technology distributions to see if we should adopt new strategies such as monitors and docking stations in all offices and laptops for people to work with both on campus and at home. Individuals who have current technology gaps should speak with their supervisors and IT Services so their challenges can be addressed.

SC&I is committed to assuring the security and integrity of our data and a high quality of technology support for our employees. We have seen that there are security gaps when people work on home equipment. While we have implemented practices to mitigate those gaps, during the pilot year we plan to consider a variety of methods for addressing effective work practices with regards to desktop computing, information security, and technology support for a future that incorporates telecommuting.

A number of SC&I staff employ Cisco Jabber to make and receive phone calls from work. Some find it sufficient to their needs, and others do not. SC&I will work with each user to determine how to implement this solution better and/or identify other solutions to make telephone use when working remotely more effective and private.