Best Practices
for
Remote Work

City of Hillsboro
<Last Update: October 2023>

Best Practices

These are some of the recommended remote-work-related practices and etiquette that employees with hybrid schedule should know when performing work remotely. These are not policy but are highly recommended practices that remote workers and managers should follow.

General Tips for Employees with Remote Work Agreement

Employees who telework often learn that working remotely is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following general tips will help you succeed while working at home.

1. **Define your workplace** – It can be easy to sit on the sofa with your laptop and expect to get work done. 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. Regardless, the Remote Work Policy requires you to have an ergonomically safe workspace.

2. **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. Ensuring your remote workspace is distraction-free is another step towards successful remote work arrangements. The following steps may help you create distraction-free remote workspace:
   - 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.
   - You might need headphones to block the neighborhood noise.

3. **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, so see if there anything around you that would not want visible during a video conference with your supervisor.

4. **Master the basics**
   - Add your remote work schedule to your email signature line.
   - Know how to remote into the City network and other online tools you regularly use.
   - Use Teams or another instant messaging platform to stay connected to colleagues.
   - Plan for Teams or Zoom video calls and meetings by making sure you know how to turn on your computer's camera and microphone and being aware that your colleague may be able to see the background behind you.

5. **Set daily goals, track them, and share your progress** – You may be surprised by how differently the workday 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 making notes about 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 ensure you are productive throughout your remote workday. Communicate with your supervisor and/or colleagues if you think your remote work plan needs to be adjusted.

6. **Stay connected** –   Remember, employees who are working remotely are working, not vacationing at home! You should be encouraged to and feel confident about calling or messaging your colleagues who are working remotely, just like anytime they would walk to your office or call them if you were working on-site.

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 just like commuting to your worksite. <u>Dress appropriately and professionally</u>. The way we dress influences both you and your colleagues.

Working Environment

A hybrid work environment exists when there is at least one team member who is working remotely. Even if the number of employees working remotely is small, the work environment should be seamless.

Supervisors with approved remote workers are expected to design the work environment for both remote workers and those on-site focusing on being inclusive by establishing workplace norms and ensuring everyone in your organization is aware of them and has the support and training needed to follow them.

Ergonomic tips for your home office – To reduce the risk of injury related to remote work activities, consider the following ergonomic tips when setting up your workstation:

Computer Setup
- Set up your keyboard and mouse together on a level surface at elbow height.
- Place your monitor an arms distance away and adjust the height of the monitor to eye level or just below. Use a monitor stand, box, or books to achieve the proper height.
- Keep arms at your side, elbows bent at 90 degrees, keeping your wrists straight or slightly downward. You may have to place a pillow or cushion under you if the table is too high.
- Whenever using a laptop, it is recommended to use an external monitor to achieve the proper monitor height.
- Close the blinds or locate the monitor away from the window to eliminate or avoid glare.

Chair Setup

- Adjust your chair so that your legs are parallel to the floor and your feet can be placed on the floor. Use a footrest or stack some books to support your feet if needed.
- If you need more back support roll up a towel or place a cushion behind your lower back to provide better lumbar support.
- Locate your phone and other accessories within in arms reach.

Note: You may be eligible for Healthy Hillsboro program to make ergonomic upgrades for your remote workspace.

Child, elderly, pets, and other forms of dependent care – While remote work may sound like a very flexible option to employees with caregiving responsibilities, remote work is not a substitute for dependent care. For remote workers with in-home dependent care arrangements, it is important to remember that remote work is official work time and a tool for accomplishing work. Remote workers are expected to make appropriate dependent care arrangements as needed to ensure that they are able to meet work hours, productivity, and other performance expectations as if they were in the office.

Employees should recognize that:
- While working remotely, all workplace policies remain in place, including hours of work, rules regarding time and attendance, and employee expectations concerning performance, productivity, and conduct.
- An in-home dependent care arrangement may pose unique challenges for remote workers that must be appropriately managed to monitor whether employees are able to successfully work remotely without jeopardizing work performance.
- While the presence of dependents in the household should not be an absolute bar to remote work, employees should not be engaging in dependent care activities when being paid to perform official duties.
- While an occasional, brief interruption may occur when a dependent is present in the home, remote workers must be careful to keep interruptions to a minimum to avoid disruptions to accomplishing work and your ability to meet productivity and other performance requirements.

In the event the level of care needed for a dependent prevents or significantly interferes with productivity, work quality, or otherwise disrupts employees from accomplishing work, remote workers should notify their supervisors as soon as possible and request approval for appropriate leave to address dependent care responsibilities.

Hours of Work and Availability
- Be transparent about work locations and work schedules.
  - You should add your workdays and hours to your email signature line.
  - You should add your work schedule to your calendars so that it becomes an expectation for managers and teammates to understand varying work schedules.
  - Use Teams "status" to indicate availability.

- o Signage – If you are an employees with hybrid schedule who have a regular workstation on-site, you should leave a note with their hybrid schedule on their office door/cubicle/computer. For example, "Working remotely on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays".

- During established work hours, employees working from their remote work location are required to be available and ready for any work-related communication or task. Employees working from their remote work location must be as available as when they are working at their City worksite. The employee's personal obligations, including dependent care, must not impact the employee's work product, productivity, or work availability. For more, refer to the **Child, elderly, pets, and other forms of dependent care** under Working Environment section earlier in this document.

- Maintain a healthy Work-Life balance – When you are working remotely, you may have difficulty establishing a healthy work-life balance. Since there is less physical separation between your workspace and your personal space, you may feel like you need to be available for work 24/7, which can lead to additional stress and eventually, burnout.
  - o It is important to create appropriate boundaries between work and home life. If you are a salaried exempt employee who may be required to work additional hours outside of your regularly assigned work schedule, you are encouraged to set appropriate work hours and take breaks. All employees are encouraged to focus on your mental and physical health regardless of work location. Non-exempt employees should adhere to their regular schedule when possible and designated by the City.
  - o Access support and assistance resources such as Canopy, our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider to help you find balance based on your circumstances.

Equipment and Data Security

Security measures in a remote work environment must cover information systems and technology, and all other aspects of the information systems used by the employee, including paper files, other media, storage devices, and telecommunications equipment (e.g., laptops, land phones, and cell phones). It is important to remember that while you are working from home or another approved remote work location, it is your responsibility to protect and manage the records and other sensitive information stored on remote work devices and transmitted across external networks. Regardless of work location, it is your responsibility to keep City property and information safe, secure, and separated from their personal property and information.

- Working remotely requires that you provide your own phone and internet service at your remote work location unless other arrangements have been authorized by the City. The City and department are not responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, or other expenses associated with the use of your residence or other appropriate remote work location.
- Managers should ensure that employees who remote work fully understand and have the technical expertise to comply with the City's requirements.

- Employees should refer to [HR Personnel Policy 9.6 – City Property and Equipment](#) to fully understand the appropriate used of City-issued cell phone or other electronic communication devices.
- Contact your department admin staff for other non-IS basic office supplies and equipment.

Communication

The nature of remote work requires constant communication and expectation setting for an employee and supervisor to remain connected, engaged, and supportive of the arrangement. Hybrid teams can feel disconnected from information (or out of the loop) and disconnected from each other. Concerted efforts to communicate regularly can help alleviate feelings of disconnect.

Prioritize Communication:
- Consider scheduling regular check-ins to see how your employee is doing with their work arrangement and if you can do anything to help them perform their work.
- Be sure to communicate any important City or department news so they have the information they need to successfully do their job.
- Pay attention to communication among team members (to the extent appropriate) to encourage and ensure that they are sharing information with each other as needed.
- As a remote employee, you will feel more engaged when you feel like you are part of a team. You should also be sure to communicate often with colleagues and with your supervisor/direct reports. Talk about challenges and opportunities you are experiencing.

Set Clear Expectations:
Supervisors should clearly communicate your expectations to remote employees. Employees appreciate knowing expectations and are motivated to meet them.
- If you want employees to be online during specific hours of the day, communicate that verbally and in writing.
- If you want a regular report of what they are working on, be sure to ask.
- Let your employees know the best way and time to reach you during the workday.
- Ensure that employees know that our workplace policies still apply to them while working remotely from their remote work location.

Meetings

It's easier to see if someone is checked out during an in-person meeting. When you are off camera, our colleagues can't read "important cues" that can be gauged from our face. Supervisors may choose to require remote employees to participate on-camera for any remote meeting. If you choose not to participate on camera when it is optional, you are losing the opportunity to engage more deeply with your team. Be fully engaged and give the remote meeting your full attention. Avoid multitasking or reading emails.

Supervisors and employees should clarify which meetings require in-person attendance and which can be entirely remote. Supervisors should communicate whether it is acceptable for someone who is

working on-site to join a meeting remotely even though they could attend the meeting in person. If it is acceptable, define under what circumstances it is okay to do so. For example, if you work in the same building, it is expected that you go to the meeting in person.

General Tips:

- Avoid having additional people/noises in the room to minimize distractions for attendees.
- When participating in meetings, find a quiet space and join the meeting from somewhere without loud background noise.
- Ensure that the space behind you appears professional and if/when it's not, use virtual backgrounds that are professional and work appropriate.
- Mute mic during periods where you are just listening to a meeting.
- If participating in a meeting via webcam, be presentable, just like you are working in an office.
- When sharing documents during the meeting, plan ahead and send files to coworkers who will participate remotely.
- Manage engagement. When possible, have remote workers lead a portion of the call so that they have an active role.
- Explore various IS- and department-approved technology options to facilitate seamless communication with your team.
- When remote, use the "raise hand" functionality when you have something to share or ask a question.
- When facilitating a virtual or hybrid meeting, pay attention to the chat activity and other interactions like virtual hands raised. Or, better yet, ask a colleague to be responsible for monitoring those so you can focus on leading the meeting.
- Be cautious when sharing your screen to ensure you don't expose confidential or private information. Share just the application window (i.e., the Word Document or PDF viewer) and not your entire screen. To be safe, close all unnecessary applications so they do not get inadvertently displayed if you share your entire screen.

Teams Meetings:

- When you schedule any Teams meeting, include a meeting link so that coworkers always have the option to participate remotely if necessary.
- If webcam is available, you should turn it on at all meetings unless:
  - You are attending to listen to the discussion and are not required active participation.
  - Your or someone else's screen is being shared on the screen.
  - You are at your City worksite and your surroundings are being distracting – examples include but not limited to construction, ongoing public interaction near you, and events taking place near you.
  - You are experiencing unexpected technological issue (you should immediately contact IS to follow up on the issue after the meeting).
- You should turn on your webcam during virtual meetings as much as possible because:
  - It fosters a connection between attendees.
  - Turning camera on can promote active participation and engagement.

- You can show non-verbal/facial cues – non-verbal/facial cues such as nodding and smiles can go a long way in helping other attendees.
  - Various studies found that showing your face during an online meeting helps in relationship building.
  - Keeping cameras on during virtual meetings also helps reduce any distractions or multitasking. When cameras are on, it becomes less likely for you and your teammate to feel tempted to get away with distractions or multitasking, as their faces and bodies are visible on the screen.
  - Turning webcam on during virtual meetings serves as a sign of respect – especially if it's the first time you meet the other participant(s).
- You should pay attention to the quality of your video and audio. The quality of your webcam and mic should be acceptable. When you use a laptop webcam, be mindful of the angle.
- Microsoft Teams is available on your smartphone as well. You can access all your teams, channels and files, as well as participate in meetings from your phone. But be sure to set personal boundaries and optimize your work hours.

Conference Calls:
- If you are leading a meeting and some team members are physically in the room, make sure they speak loudly enough so people on the conference line are able to hear clearly.
- Be an active listener on conference calls by verbally acknowledging that you are listening, by using short statements to paraphrase the main takeaways, and asking for permission to ask questions. Regularly give and receive feedback. Use your feedback to discuss outcomes and actions.
- If you have something to contribute or missed something that someone said, be sure to jump in rather than waiting to be asked as meeting facilitators cannot read your body language and may not recognize the need to pause and invite your participation.

Department-Specific Rules

Departments may set their own rules for remote work in addition to the Citywide requirements. Departments are required to have a written document that outlines department-specific requirements for remote work, and this document will be reviewed by HR and approved by the City Manager before it goes effective. Departments may follow the recommended writing guidance below when drafting their department-specific rules for remote work.

- Keep it simple. It should be easily understood by the entire department.
- Department-specific rules should be written with enough clarity.
- Make it relevant. Department-specific rules should clearly tell the audience why it exists (purposes), who it affects (applicability and scope), eligibility, major conditions, and restrictions, when and under what circumstances it applies, and how it should be executed.
- Ensure the department-specific rules can be enforced. Avoid writing a rule/policy without the intention to enforce it, or committing to obligations without ensuring proper resources.

- A policy doesn't need to be lengthy. In many instances, shorter is better. The goal is to concisely convey important information in a clear manner.

Effectively Managing Hybrid Work Arrangements

Remote/Hybrid work arrangements allow departments to support employees who may benefit from or need to adopt a different work plan. Effectively managing hybrid work arrangements depends on communication about departmental commitments and norms and understanding the supports available for managers and employees.

Express department-wide commitments:

- Trust employees to take personal responsibility for fulfilling work responsibilities, as is required of all City employees.
- Encourage collaboration and creativity when it comes to completing work while ensuring employees are still timely performing their essential job duties and offering flexibility.
  - *Please note*: remote work is not a mechanism to create a new job, eliminate essential functions of a position, or to change the type of work that an employee is required to perform. If you are a supervisor or manager and want to assign out-of-class work, change a position, or create a position, please consult with Human Resources staff and follow established City policies for such changes.
- Recognize and acknowledge expectations of those exempt employees regularly exceeding FTE and encourage that managers ensure expectations are reasonable.
- When evaluating performance, acknowledge both accomplishments and challenges faced.
- Empower managers to use all available flexible approaches to enable employees to perform their functions under a realistic workload.
- Acknowledge the perspectives of both employees with hybrid schedule and employees who cannot work remotely and recognize that each position's needs may vary over time.

Establish specific departmental norms:

- Institute department-wide "no meeting hour" or "no meeting day" when possible and practical for the nature of the work.
- Refer to remote workers' remote work agreement when discussing their expectations and responsibilities while working remotely.
- Support and encourage participation in Mindful Hillsboro, the City's new mental health-first and total wellness initiative.
- Establish norms around expectations for virtual meeting participation. Examples: whether video is required.
- If your department has approved employees for remote work, establish norms for all staff to support transparency, collaboration, and communication by asking employees to:
  - Add their work schedule to their email signature and calendar to communicate availability.
  - Create an out-of-office message to communicate a hybrid schedule.

- o Email the entirety of their unit, not just their manager, about their revised work schedule, or provide a central place where work schedules may be viewed, in order to support collaboration.
- o Be transparent about their availability and challenges and work with their manager to clarify what time blocks work best for meetings or conference calls. While all meetings cannot be scheduled around hybrid schedules, ensuring employees understand each other's realities may help mitigate avoidable scheduling conflicts.
- o For exempt employees, limit responses to email while on vacation or time off. Non-exempt employees should not check, review, or respond to City email while on vacation or time off without advanced authorization.

Short-Term, Temporary Remote Work Assignment

An approved short-term, temporary remote work arrangement does not reduce expectations regarding an employee's performance and does not serve as a precedent for future arrangements within a department. Employee-requested flexible arrangements are a privilege, are revocable <u>at the discretion of department director or designee</u> at any time and should not be an expectation of employment.

- Departments should set criteria to be eligible for short-term, temporary remote work assignments.
  - o If employees have not requested remote work during such period, supervisors should not request employees to work during periods of illness or other protected time off (e.g., periods of family leave, state mandated sick time, etc.)
- Make sure the eligibility for short-term, temporary remote work assignment opportunity is consistent across the department; departments may include this information in their department specific rule document.
- If the requested short-term, temporary remote work assignments will take place outside of the State of Oregon:
  - o Ensure that the assignment is reviewed with Human Resources for compliance with applicable out-of-state requirements.
  - o Consider time difference between Oregon and other states/countries where remote work is performed from. Ensure the employee and their work team and supervisor have a clear understanding of work hours and how to contact each other.
- Do not wait to request short-term, temporary remote work assignments until the last minute. Proactively start a conversation as soon as possible with your supervisor and Department Director about the potential short-term remote work assignments that may impact departmental operations.
- If you or your supervisors have any concerns regarding short-term, temporary remote work assignments, please contact HR for further guidance.

Onboarding

On boarding a new employee working remotely includes many of the same practices as welcoming an employee to the City, but with greater intentionality on helping make connections and understand department culture.

Prepare for the employee's first day:
- Review new employee onboarding resources for required tasks to be completed by new employees and to learn useful practices for onboarding.
- Explain why in-person onboarding period is set for new employees and your expectations as their manager during that period.
- Your expectation for in-person attendance on first day and at required orientations, if applicable, or discussion of options if the employee is not attending in person due to special circumstance.
- A brief description of the steps you will take as a manager of a remote workers.
- If the employee is considering remote work after onboarding period, go over the policy and ask the employee to familiarize themselves with the policy.
- Identify equipment, tools, and systems needed to ensure team members working onsite can seamlessly interact with the remote employee (e.g., video cameras in conference rooms, familiarity with Teams or other remote scheduling tools and screen sharing.
    - Review departmental and Citywide policies regarding equipment purchase and use.

Build collegiality by involving your team:
- Discuss your team's concerns and requests, and answer job-related questions they may have about the employee's telework or remote arrangement.
- Identify and document team norms to ensure that remote work is as seamless as possible with coworkers who are onsite such as meeting scheduling expectations and norms, tools and technology for collaborative use, etc.

Develop plans and schedules for the employee's first day and weeks:
- Discuss and approve your employee's Remote Work Arrangement, being very specific about work schedule, and expectations for communications (responding to emails, answering calls, attending meetings by Teams/Zoom or phone). If applicable, also discuss the types of activities that may require in-person attendance.
- Discuss equipment needs and document provided or purchased equipment, per the City and departmental policy. Retain records of equipment provided or purchased.
- Introduce your new employee to your team, including other employees who are working remotely or with other work arrangements.
- Jointly schedule, with your new employee, future check-in meetings including any occurring on an employee's planned remote work day.
- Ensure employees are added to the applicable listservs, Teams channels, and other collaborative tools.
- Provide your employee with a written plan or checklist for onboarding, including providing names, emails, and phone numbers of colleagues who will provide training or mentorship. This can serve as a performance review plan and include objectives to meet, tasks to accomplish, and products to develop along with timeframes for work products.

Measure outcomes frequently:

- Focusing on measuring outcomes (the position, not the person), discuss with individual team members, including the remote worker, how the arrangement is working or not working for them and/or their customers/stakeholders.
- Evaluate work products for quality, quantity, and timeliness and evaluate whether the remote worker met expectations regarding availability and communications when teleworking.

Offboarding checklist for remote workers

Offboarding a remote employee requires many of the same tasks a manager must perform when ending employment for an in-person employee. This checklist is to help you guide a successful offboarding experience for your team and the departing employee.

- ☐ Plan frequent check-ins until the remote worker's last day of work. This creates room to wrap up or transition work and provides the employee with a personal connection as they transition out of their role.
- ☐ Review the employee's Remote Work Agreement and/or records documenting City-issued or purchased equipment and decide on the method for return (e.g., drop off at IS, mail, etc.)
- ☐ Identify work products that exist as hard copy that must be retained under the state's Public Records Act and City records retention policies and arrange for their return to the City.
- ☐ For voluntary resignations, communicate early to the team about the employee's departure to ensure that the departing remote worker is removed from standing meeting invites so team members have an opportunity to connect with and say farewell to the departing employee prior to their last day.
- ☐ Celebrate the employee's contributions through group email or team meeting for the departing employee, as appropriate.
- ☐ Work with IS department to turn off access to City devices, intranet, and other systems as applicable as of the employee's last day of employment.