Flexible Work Options – Supervisor Tool Kit

Michigan Tech recognizes the importance of flexibility in the workplace for staff. Flexible work options (FWO) offer a way to provide excellent customer service while managing people, time, space, and workload in an effective and efficient manner.

Potential Benefits of Flexible Work
- Increased employee initiative
- Increased productivity
- Increased loyalty and morale
- Increased employee satisfaction
- Expand number of hours office is open for customers
- Uninterrupted time for getting work done
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced turnover
- Reduced overtime/comp time
- Decrease in workplace stress by being able to better balance work and personal responsibilities

Who is eligible?
- Full-time, regular exempt and non-exempt staff who have completed their probationary period
- Employee meets or exceeds performance standards
- Employee has successfully completed probationary period
- Supervisor must assess job needs (both department and customer)
- Flexible work is not appropriate/available for all positions or situations
- Employees are not required to participate unless part of the conditions of employment

NOTE: Flexible schedules are not subject to complaints and/or grievances.

Guidelines for Success
1. Flexible work options should support the department/unit goals, as well as those of the University.
2. Be familiar with flexible work options. Consider the benefits and drawbacks for your area.
3. Carefully consider each request on its merits, potential organizational benefits, and benefits to the employee.
4. Written plans should be developed and approved for every employee using flexible work options to document what is expected by all parties. Arrangements for communication and performance should be established.
5. Remember that not every job is appropriate for flexible work options nor is every employee.
6. If you are questioning whether or not flexible work is appropriate, consider proposing a trial period.
7. Establish times for exchanging feedback about employee performance and the operations of the flexible work option.
Evaluating Requests for Flexible Work Options

- Can flexible work contribute to the overall effectiveness of your department and/or the flow of work? (For example, could your office be open additional hours to accommodate customers?)
- Do flexible work options make sense for the position?
- What are the operational needs of the department?
- Are there core hours where all employees need to be in the office?
- What are the customer needs of the department?
- Are there work flow considerations within the department? With other departments?
- What arrangements will need to be made if questions arise in the employee’s absence?
- Is the employee part of a team that would require matching schedules for all involved?
- Is the department able to provide coverage for duties handled by the employee without hardship for other employees?
- Will duties need to be covered during the time the person is away from the office? If so, who will cover them? What cross-training might be needed?
- What level supervision is necessary for the employee?
- How will you evaluate performance of the individual? How often will you formally evaluate?
- Has the person’s performance been satisfactory to this point?
- Are extra planning, project coordination, and evaluation necessary to accommodate the request?
- Are there any restrictions on when and where work must be performed?
- How will you deal with multiple requests for the same time off?
- What other FWO requests have been made? How will you evaluate fairness of FWO granted?
- How will you involve other employees in accommodating the work arrangements?
- How will you communicate the flexible work arrangements to others in the department?
- How often will you evaluate the flexible arrangements and make changes if necessary?
- Is a trial period appropriate for the request?
- What are the work/life needs of the employee?
- Could a flexible work option be offered as a management tool to retain a valuable employee?
- Could the work/life balance of individuals be improved through flexible work?
- How will you manage goals and expectations for the employee?
- How will you say ‘no’ if you are unable to honor the request?
- How will you handle the situation if the flexible arrangement doesn’t work out?

Remember – what works for one office/area/department may not work for another.

FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS

Flextime
Start time and end time of an employee’s work day vary or the days of the week an employee works are varied
- Employee works 8 hours per day.
- Need to make sure that FLSA implications (break times, lunch time and comp time) are addressed for non-exempt (hourly) employees.

Special thanks to Cleveland State University, George Washington University, Cornell University, Lehigh University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Kentucky, University of Arizona and MIT – their WorkLife websites were especially helpful and are quoted widely in these guidelines.
Considerations for Flextime
- Working outside of normal business hours
- Communication between employee, supervisor, others in the office, customers
- Ability to supervise employee
- Supervisor’s ability to evaluate work of employee
- Application of University policies (holiday, vacation and sick leave)
- Overtime obligations for non-exempt employees (working more than 40 hours in a work week)
- How often will there be a review of the flexplace arrangement?

Compressed Workweek
*Work is completed in fewer than five full work days per week*
- Regular hours worked are extended to allow the employee to have a half-day or full day off
- For non-exempt employees, 15-minute breaks are allowed every half-day of work, along with 30-60 minutes off for a lunch break
- Non-exempt employees may work more than 8 hours per day as long as they do not work more than 40 hours a week.
- Examples include: four (4) 10-hour work days per week and four (4) 9-hour days with one 4-hour day per week
- Some variations may occur due to established University holidays

Considerations for Compressed Workweek
- Working outside of normal business hours
- Communication between employee, supervisor, others in the office, customers
- Supervisor’s ability to evaluate work of employee
- Ability to evaluate work of employee
- Application of University policies (holiday, vacation and sick leave)
- Overtime obligations for non-exempt employees (working more than 40 hours in a work week)
- Coverage of office/customers when person is out of the office
- How often will there be a review of the flexplace arrangement?

Flexplace/Telework
*Work arrangement that allows an employee to work from home or another designated site for all or some portion of his or her scheduled work hours*
NOTE: This does not apply to situations where an employee may work at home on an occasional basis. These arrangements should be approved on a case-by-case basis and do not require formal authorization.

Prior to approving a Flexplace/Telework option, the supervisor should discuss technology and user support needs/issues with their IT Systems Support organization.
Questions/Considerations for Flexplace/Telework

- Is the employee able to work effectively without direct supervision?
- How will communication with co-workers and supervisors be handled?
- Is the proposed telecommuting agreement in the best interests of the University/department or is it only being proposed for the convenience of the employee?
- Where will the site be located?
- Does the setting encourage a safe and effective situation?
- What is the anticipated duration of the arrangement?
- What is the proposed work schedule at the flexplace site?
- How often is the employee expected to return to the regular work location?
- What agreement has been reached between the employee and supervisor regarding work to be done, assessment, and monitoring of work results and employee performance?
- What equipment is required for the employee to effectively perform her/his job?
- What equipment will the employee supply? What equipment will the University supply?
- What office supplies will the employee need?
- Does the department have sufficient budget resources to provide necessary supplies and equipment for an alternate work location?
- What additional services will be required – internet, phone, fax, copier? Who will be responsible for providing additional services?
- What arrangements need to be made for maintenance and service of any university-owned equipment used at the site?
- Does the employee have remote access to the workplace computer?
- What level of data security needs to be maintained?
- What provisions need to be in place to prevent unauthorized access to confidential or sensitive information or data?
- Does the employee understand that care-giving responsibilities are not to be part of the flexplace agreement?
- Is the employee hourly or exempt? If hourly, are there issues that need to be considered about overtime?
- Is the employee familiar with use of vacation, sick leave and holiday policies and how they will be applied to the agreement?
- How often will there be a review of the flexplace arrangement?

Supervisor Responsibilities for Successful Flexible Work

- Consider potential benefits to the department when assessing flexible work requests from employees.
- Make sure that clear expectations are set and measurements are defined.
- Define how the work flow will be accomplished – have the team work on this together.
- Define how technology supports flexible work, including flexplace and telecommuting.
- If there are core hours when everyone needs to be available in the workplace, make certain they are defined and everyone knows them.
- Determine how you will communicate with those who are not utilizing flexible work options. It’s critical that everyone is on board and understands what will be happening.
• Use a trial period to see if this really will work for your area. As long as it is not a condition of the job, either the employee or the supervisor can cancel a flexible work arrangement at any time.
• Look at flexible work as an opportunity to examine workflows and processes within the office.
• Understand the benefits, both to the employee and the employer, of flexible work and share successes with others.
• Set regular meeting times with the employee(s) to ensure success.
• Be open to flexible work options for your employees where possible.
• Continuously evaluate effectiveness of the flexible work arrangement.
• Weeks with paid holidays may require a schedule adjustment.
• Be prepared to communicate your decision, both to the employee and to others in the office.
• Set clear expectations for the employee.
• Be willing to make an effort to work through problems that may arise.

When approved, complete the Flexible Work Options Agreement form so that the WorkLife Connections Office can track what’s happening on campus. If the request is not approved, fill out the FWO Denial of Request form and send it to the WorkLife Connections Office.