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Remote Workers and Telecommuting Practices for Nonprofits

Flexibility is one of the most important determinants of employee satisfaction and retention. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, [flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, were becoming more commonplace](#). Advances in technology allow remote workers to stay connected with their workplaces, and technology can now be used by workers to perform many, if not all, tasks that were once possible only from traditional offices.

The reality today is that work has become so mobile that some nonprofits operate with “virtual offices.” For staff working for these nonprofits, every worker is a remote worker. And nonprofits that do have physical offices may still want to offer employees the option of flexible work arrangements , since it can boost productivity, improve employee satisfaction, save employees travel time, potentially help [close the gender gap](#), and reduce the organization’s carbon footprint.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of employees began working from home, and [many prefer to continue fully or partially remote \(hybrid\) work](#).

Does your nonprofit need a written policy to address the situation? Perhaps your nonprofit’s personnel policies are flexible enough to address remote workers, but it’s most likely that at least some policies and procedures will need to be re-evaluated

with remote workers in mind.

More employers are offering flexible work spaces as a recruitment and retention tool. But not all employers will adopt remote work practices, and certainly not all positions are appropriate for remote work. A nonprofit employer may need to retain the discretion to decide if a particular position/role is eligible for telecommuting or not.

Practice Pointers

- Customized arrangements can help attract and retain valuable employees, but anytime an employer crafts a policy for some people/some situations, the policy should be reviewed by legal counsel to make sure it does not create a risk of being applied in a discriminatory manner.
- The nonprofit may need to invest in new technology in order to equitably support employees who are telecommuting, so all employees have the same tools and access to the same information and capabilities. Additional investments may be necessary to protect the nonprofit's systems and data.
- Speaking of equity, different employees' home circumstances must be respected. We've learned that toddlers and cats can be welcome guests on conference calls. As long as the work is getting done, be understanding of your employees' needs to take care of family.
- Not being in the office regularly can be isolating for remote workers. Try to find ways for regular check-ins with colleagues who work remotely, and make sure you are sharing information with them that they would have had access to if they were just down the hall.
- The expectations for complying with workplace policies and procedures should be the same for remote workers as for their colleagues who are regularly working in the office.
- Be sure to set expectations about working hours, especially if remote workers are in different time zone. [This article suggests three rules for success](#) with remote workers: (1) make the work traceable; (2) keep the employee engaged; and (3) create an atmosphere of trust.
- There are practical issues of ownership and reimbursement of costs that the nonprofit employer and remote worker will need to work out in connection with the employee's workstation, computer, and cell phone. Home offices may also trigger concerns about data security, property and casualty liability insurance

coverage, including workers compensation insurance. If the worker's home is in a different state from the nonprofit employer's principal office, be aware of any [state tax liability](#).

- Make sure to let your nonprofit's insurance carrier(s) know that there are remote workers so that the agent/broker/carrier can work through any risks that may require adjustments to insurance policies.
- Nonprofits with virtual offices need to consider how to adjust traditional workplace policies for their circumstances, as well as how to manage members of the public seeking a physical address on the nonprofit's website.

Related Insights and Analysis

- [The Workforce Is Changing. It's Time to Consider Making Hybrid Work Permanent.](#) (June, 2023)

Additional Resources

- [7 things nobody told you about working remotely](#) (Wordstream)
- [NTEN's Technology-Enabled Operations Report](#) (NTEN)
- [The Future of Hybrid Work: 5 Key Questions Answered with Data](#) (Gallup)
- [Managing remote worker risk](#) (Nonprofit Risk Management Center)
- [Remote Work Is Here to Stay: Make It Work for Your Nonprofit with These Tips](#) (Mobile Citizen)

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