

Flexible Work Schedules – Guidelines for Success

Because Western Carolina University is a complex organization with diverse work environments, Flexible Work Options are offered as guidelines rather than as policy as no single approach would apply for all situations. These guidelines will help supervisors and employees think more carefully and creatively about how a flexible work arrangement can support institutional goals and improve employee satisfaction.

1. Flexible work options should support WCU's (and school, entity, department and/or unit's) goals, including cost-effectiveness and customer service
2. Jobs should be appropriate for the flexible work option, and equipment, systems or materials must be available during non-traditional hours or outside of the workplace to support arrangement, if necessary
3. The staff member's work style and performance history should support the requirements of the option (e.g., ability to work independently without direct supervision and past/current performance designated at least as fully achieved expectations)
4. Written plans should be developed and approved for the flexible work arrangement to document the understanding between all involved parties
5. Supervisor and school/entity/department leadership should approve the plan and be prepared to manage the work under the conditions of the arrangement. Each entity/department must determine the appropriate individual(s) to approve these arrangements in addition to the immediate supervisor. Department leadership has sole responsibility for determining all work schedules.
6. Special arrangements for communication and accountability should be established
7. An effort should be made to maintain a collaborative environment, through special opportunities for staff members to have shared hours and constructive interactions with the rest of the unit or department
8. A pilot period is often helpful for trying out a flexible work arrangement prior to making a longer-term commitment by either the supervisor or staff member

All should be prepared to return to pre-flexibility arrangements if the goals of the arrangement are not being met

How to Introduce

Flexible work options require supervisor and departmental leadership approval and depend on a partnership between the supervisor and employee to ensure that the needs of both the employee and the institution are being met. Flexible work options are generally introduced in a work environment by a staff member who determines that he/she would like to have a flexible work option. However, supervisors may also suggest flexible work options for some or all staff members.

Flexible Work Hours

Flexible work hours are the most commonly requested, the easiest to manage and the most affordable flexible work option. It offers flexibility in arrival, departure and/or meal times, typically with a designated core-time mid-day during which all staff members are present.

While there are no strict rules governing flexible work hours, time flexibility usually is built into the beginning, middle or end of the day. These arrangements often include a designated time through the central portion of the day during which all staff are present, referred to as "the core work time" or "core hours." Core hours encourage continued connection between staff members and offer opportunities for group meetings and communications.

Advantages and Challenges

Advantages	Challenges
<p>Most flexible work hour arrangements involve slight variations in the staff member's normal schedule. As a result, they are among the easiest flexible work arrangements to manage (for supervisors and staff members).</p>	<p>Loosely structured flexible work hour arrangements may present several challenges, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adequate department coverage and customer service, and • ability to monitor overtime for non-exempt staff members.
<p>Staggering the beginning and ending times of staff members in a particular work unit can improve work area coverage and extend the hours of service to internal and external customers.</p>	<p>In areas where several staff members work flexible work hour schedules, it may be a challenge to coordinate staff members' schedules for adequate department coverage and customer service.</p>
<p>Flexibility and variety of hours worked can vary commute times.</p>	<p>It may be a challenge to sustain morale among staff members who do not have the opportunity to work a flexible work arrangement but who have co-workers with flexible work arrangements.</p>
<p>Allows staff members to schedule work around their needs.</p>	<p>Staff members may get "stuck" in the same routine for a long period of time.</p>

Flextime Example

An employee worked with their supervisor to establish a flextime working arrangement so they would be able to pick their daughter up from school each day and participate in the daughters after-school activities. The employee's flextime schedule allows them to come into work at 6 a.m. and leave at 3 p.m. daily.

Telecommuting

Telecommuting enables an employee to work off-site for all or part of the workweek on a regular basis. In certain situations, the University considers telecommuting to be a viable alternative to working from a central university worksite in cases where the characteristics of the employee, supervisor, and work are compatible with such an arrangement, and the physical environment, equipment, and technology are adequate to support it.

Telecommuting is a work arrangement that enables a staff member to work at home or from another off-site location for all or part of the regular workweek. Telecommuting may be appropriate for only some employees and jobs. It is not an organizational-wide benefit that is available to all employees, and in no way changes the standard policies, terms, and conditions of employment with Western Carolina University. Telecommuting arrangements must comply with federal, and state laws that apply to employees at WCU. This includes, but is not limited to, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and Worker's compensation.

Typically, a Telecommuting arrangement will specify the number of hours to be worked at home or off site and the specific time in which this will occur (eg., every Tuesday, the first Monday of the month, etc.). In cases where the department agrees to support some or all of the costs of an off-site office, the supervisor and staff member should discuss all applicable costs, including that of additional telephone lines, telephone use charges and Internet Service Provider (ISP) charges, as appropriate.

Staff members working under a Telecommuting arrangement will come on-site for periodic meetings and interactions with the supervisor. Telecommuting does not connote the professional or management practice of working at home or off site after hours to work on reports or presentations or to catch up on reading.

Note: When telecommuting arrangements require use of computing technology from an off-site office, it will be necessary to arrange through the entity or department specific and detailed arrangements for support of the technology, as well as appropriate access to WCU's network. Consideration should also be given to possible working hours and the comparable availability of various administrative systems. Additionally, it is important for supervisors and staff members to be aware of the costs that will be incurred for establishing appropriate hardware, software, and connectivity; costs that will be incurred operating and maintaining that setup; costs of providing support for that setup; etc.

Advantages and Challenges

Advantages	Challenges
Telecommuting reduces or eliminates a staff member's daily commute, which can lead to lower stress levels and lower personal expenses.	Staff members who telecommute have fewer opportunities for face-to-face communication with their supervisor and co-workers; as a result, they may find it difficult to avoid feelings of alienation - "out of sight - out of mind."
Staff members who telecommute are likely to be more productive because of fewer interruptions.	Telecommuting will be difficult to implement successfully unless there is a high level of trust and on-going communication between the supervisor and staff member.
Telecommuting may be a good arrangement for staff members doing project-oriented or independent work. It is also a good arrangement for staff members whose work requires long periods of quiet, focused time.	Employees should not use telecommuting as a substitute for their regular dependent care arrangements.
Telecommuting has the potential to attract and retain staff members and decrease absenteeism and tardiness.	The initial cost for a home office set up may be expensive: technology, telephone, safety, tech support, etc.

Telecommuting Example

- An employee found that a telecommuting arrangement helped them complete regular reports that required a large amount of undisturbed time to produce. They now work on these reports from home on Tuesdays. The arrangement has helped the employee meet report deadlines more effectively, reduce their stress level and become more efficient with their time in the office.

Flexible Work Schedules

A compressed work schedule may allow an employee to work a traditional 40 hour workweek in less than five workdays. For example, a full-time employee could work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days.

This option is more easily applied to non-exempt (bi-weekly paid) staff for whom maximum work hours are identified, but it is not ruled out for monthly paid staff who may work more than 40 hours during the work week. University payroll practices require non-exempt staff that agree to a flexible work week arrangement to be paid overtime based on all hours over 40 in a workweek.

Advantages and Challenges

Advantages	Challenges
<p>Staff members working flexible work schedules may spend less time commuting during a given week.</p>	<p>The longer workday may be physically and mentally draining.</p>
<p>Staff members working flexible work schedules have more time outside of work to take care of personal responsibilities; as a result they can be more focused on the tasks at hand during their scheduled work time.</p>	<p>It may be a challenge to sustain morale among staff members who work long days but do not have the opportunity to work a compressed work week.</p>
<p>Staff members working flexible work schedules may be more productive during the hours outside of the traditional workday, when fewer staff members are present.</p>	<p>Some types of flexible work schedules, such as schedules that extend across a two standard work weeks, may present a challenge to supervisors of non-exempt staff members, since overtime must be paid to non-exempt staff members who work more than 40 hours in a given week.</p>
<p>Flexible work schedules can improve work area coverage and extend the hours of service to internal and external customers.</p>	<p>Staff members may find it difficult to arrange dependent care or transportation around the longer workday.</p>

Flexible Work Schedule Example

- They wanted to find a way to integrate more personal time into their life while continuing to meet their responsibilities at work. After assessing the situation with their supervisor, they agreed that a flexible work schedule could be beneficial for them. Working a compressed work schedule permits them to work four 10-hour days, giving them an extra day off during the workweek to handle responsibilities they have outside of the workplace.