Evaluating Remote Work Opportunities

a guide for exploring the decision-making process

Introduction

As remote work and partially remote work (also called "hybrid") practices have become mainstream due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work is now more fully integrated into the University's long term workforce approach. At K-State, some roles and functions will always require physical presence and standard hours, but many others can use remote work principles and practices to work together efficiently and effectively within their teams to meet the University's academic and business objectives.

Those who are evaluating remote work possibilities should begin by familiarizing themselves with Kansas State University's Remote Work Policy and reviewing this comprehensive decision-making guide.

There are multiple factors to consider when exploring the possibility of remote work. This guide is divided into several sections, each focusing on a separate aspect of consideration:

> Section 1: Evaluating Business Need
>
> Section 2: Position Suitability
>
> Section 3: Employee Suitability
>
> Section 4: Supervisory Approach
>
> Section 5: Team Effectiveness

The Remote Work Suitability Assessment should be completed in conjunction with this guide and is the first step in establishing a remote work arrangement. The assessment form documents suitability factors for remote work and is also utilized to obtain appropriate approval from senior leadership at the Cabinet or Dean level.

For additional information or guidance related to remote work arrangements, please visit the Human Capital Services remote work website.

Section 1: Evaluating Business Need

Remote work can be a dynamic tool and a vehicle to enable innovation and shape the future of work at Kansas State University.

Under optimal conditions, once approved and implemented, remote work should have either a net-positive or net-neutral effect on business results and the work environment. In other words, the same work is getting accomplished at another time, in another place, or in another way, ideally having a positive effect. In some cases it might have a mixed effect — but one where the arrangement does not have an overall negative impact on the team or on individual performance.

Given the general intent of remote work mentioned above, leaders may consider the following:

- *Is a remote work arrangement in the best interests of the university?*

- *Would a remote work arrangement enhance, maintain or diminish operational efficiencies?*

- *Does the addition of one or more remote work arrangements enhance the productivity of the department and the employees?*

Section 2: Position Suitability

A position can be considered suitable for remote work if some or most of its responsibilities can be performed away from the regular work location. The work should involve clearly defined tasks and have well understood outcomes. Jobs that entail working independently are often suitable for remote work – for example: writer, analyst, accountant, programmer, or other "knowledge" workers. Jobs that require physical presence or significant interaction with stakeholders, coworkers and/or students to perform effectively are normally not suitable for remote work - for example: most faculty, executive assistant, custodial specialist or skilled trades positions.

Each position should be considered individually, per the responsibilities of the role, to determine if the work can be done effectively outside of the regular work environment. Some roles may be suited for a hybrid approach with some work completed on campus or facility work location and some completed remotely.

The focus in remote work arrangements must be on measurable results. The change in work location should not impact productivity, customer service, operational efficiency, or team collaboration.

When considering a position's suitability, do key duties involve any of the following?

- *Require ongoing access to equipment, materials, and files that can only be accessed on campus.*
- *Require extensive face-to-face contact with students, supervisors, other employees, or the public.*
- *Require extensive time in meetings or on collaborative efforts.*
- *Involve performing work on campus.*
- *Security considerations that require presence on campus or facility location.*

Section 3: Employee Suitability

Once it has been determined that all or some of the position responsibilities can be performed outside of the regular work environment, the employee's compatibility for remote work opportunities must be evaluated.

Suitability for remote work arrangements should be considered on a case-by-case basis for current and potential employees. This section will help you determine if the employee can work in a self-directed manner in managing their work and time.

Factors relating to employee suitability for remote work arrangements may include:

- *The employee's most recent performance history (including disciplinary action).*
- *The employee's initiative, time management, and organizational skills.*
- *The employee has the necessary computer skills to complete their required job functions outside of the office.*
- *The employee understands their role and expectations, and requires little supervision to complete their tasks.*
- *The employee's performance at home can be measured and evaluated.*

Section 4: Supervisory Approach

Supervisors serve as leaders of employees, team builders, coaches, mentors, and trainers. A supervisor should consider compatibility of their own management style for remote work arrangements. This section will help you determine if your managerial/supervisory style supports engaging in one or more remote work arrangements with employees.

Factors relating to compatibility of supervisory approach for remote work arrangements may include:

- *Are you comfortable allowing this employee to work largely autonomously?*
- *How frequently do you monitor the employee's work performance?*
  - *Weekly*
  - *Monthly*
  - *Other Intervals*
- *Are you comfortable communicating virtually with your employee?*
- *Have you been successful in establishing clear objectives?*
- *Can you accurately measure the employee's performance, outcomes, and time worked?*
- *Do you trust that the employee will be productive without continuous supervision?*

Section 5: Team Effectiveness

Effective teams foster open dialogue and collaboration among others for a sense of belonging and strong team morale. Supervisors are encouraged to individualize plans that reasonably honor the needs of their employees while also supporting efficiencies to ensure work is completed effectively. This section will help you determine if the culture of your team is compatible with the establishment of one or more remote work arrangements.

Factors relating to team compatibility for remote work arrangements may include:

- *Do team members frequently work on detailed and complex projects that require collaboration and partnership?*
- *Does an employee's work location impact team work processes and efficiency?*
- *Can the team sustain engagement in a virtual or hybrid work environment?*
- *Does the team possess resiliency to maintain trust and a strong team morale in the face of challenges?*
- *Would the team support and embrace a work environment with a combination of on site and remote work arrangements?*

Other Considerations

In addition to the considerations covered in the first five sections of this decision-making guide, there are several other miscellaneous factors that may or may not be relevant to the remote work arrangement you are considering.

Please review the questions and statements below and evaluate whether the answers would impact the success of a remote work arrangement.

- *Does the department have the appropriate budget/equipment to support an employee in a remote work arrangement?*

- *Are professional development opportunities available to remote employees?*

- *Is the employee in their probationary period? If so, you may consider waiting to determine suitability for a remote work arrangement until performance has been consistently established.*

- *Will the remote employee be located in a place with a significantly different cost of living? K-State will operate within its current compensation and benefits structure regardless of remote work location.*

Advancing a Request

Advancing a Remote Work Arrangement Request

If after thorough review of this decision-making guide, a department head or supervisor wants to pursue a remote work arrangement, they must:

1. Complete a Remote Work Suitability Assessment. This form documents suitability factors in each of the sections addressed in this guide.

2. Obtain approval from senior leadership at the Cabinet or Dean level. This approval can be documented on the assessment form mentioned above.
   a. If approval is granted, communicate with your employee. A sample communication template is available on the HCS remote work website.
   b. If approval is declined, proceed to the section on page 9 for instructions on Declining a Remote Work Arrangement Request.

3. Complete a Remote Work Agreement form in collaboration with the employee. The agreement documents details about the remote work arrangement including work location, job duties, and work schedule. In addition, it specifies operating parameters and acknowledgements unique to the working arrangement.

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the remote work arrangement. New remote work arrangements should be reviewed for efficiency and effectiveness at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals. Following this, successful remote work arrangements should be reviewed on an annual basis.

Declining a Request

Declining a Remote Work Arrangement Request

If after thorough review of this decision-making guide, a department head or supervisor decides *not* to pursue a remote work arrangement, they should:

1. Complete a Remote Work Suitability Assessment. This form documents suitability factors in each of the sections addressed in this guide. In addition, this form provides an opportunity to capture the business reason for declining the request.

2. Consult with your appropriate senior leadership at the Cabinet or Dean level. Determine if they wish to be notified of your decision to decline the remote work arrangement request.

3. Communicate with your employee. If the assessment does not support a remote work arrangement, you are encouraged to share the decision along with the business reasons. A sample communication template is available on the HCS remote work website.

4. Documentation of the assessment should be sent to your designated HCS Liaison. This ensures documentation is retained for each remote work suitability assessment completed and available for later reference.

Conclusion

Remote work arrangements have the potential to be a powerful and innovative tool for K-State. Leaders are encouraged to carefully evaluate each remote work arrangement request on a case-by-case basis while also considering implications for their unit overall according to the considerations outlined in this guide.

Remaining objective and consistently applying decision-making criteria is critical to ensuring equity within work units and the overall success of remote work at K-State.

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As we look ahead, cooperation and support from all leaders will be needed to navigate the integration of remote work into the university's long-term workforce approach. Leaders are encouraged to remain mindful as we navigate the nuances of remote work in a future that has yet to come into focus. Patience and planning are integral to ensuring success for change of this magnitude.

For additional information or guidance related to remote work arrangements, please visit the Human Capital Services remote work website. Questions about the remote work policy or navigating the remote work agreement process can be directed to hr@ksu.edu.