

# Expanded Teleworking Options

*Flexible work options offer many benefits*



## The Impact

Teleworking has positive benefits for businesses, employees and the environment. The flexibility it affords can help attract and retain good employees, saving considerable replacement costs. A study by the American Management Association in 2020 found that teleworking reduced unscheduled absences by 63 percent. Global Workplace Analytics found that telecommuting reduces real estate costs by \$10,000 per employee teleworking full time. In addition, a Federal News Network survey concluded that many teleworkers are more productive when they work from home, due to fewer distractions and reduced commute times. And employees save on commuting costs and enjoy greater flexibility with their work-life balance.

Another benefit is that teleworking drastically reduces commute trips and vehicle miles traveled. Studies have documented a link between working fewer hours and lower emissions. Large-scale trials in Iceland found a four-day workweek reduced stress and increased the well-being of employees.

## Description

Teleworking is a voluntary work arrangement that allows employees to work off-site on an agreed-upon schedule. Robust and permanent teleworking policies set clear, objective expectations and requirements, and they allocate the necessary resources to ensure effective implementation. Formal policies also include adequate training for teleworkers.

Formal policies can outline the telework options offered to employees depending on the type of work they do. These options can range from occasional work-from-home days (such as once a week) to full-time telework. Other options include altered work weeks such as 9/80 or 4/10 schedules where employees work 80 hours in 9 days or 40 hours in 4 days, respectively. Teleworking and alternative work schedule eligibility can factor in metrics such as employee performance reviews or attendance history. Another option for employers is to designate “core” days when all staff are required on-site.

## **Where It's Been Implemented**

Even before the pandemic, many employers had implemented telework policies to reduce costs and boost productivity. For example, Dell established a “Connected Workplace” program in 2009 that offers flexible work plans. Before the pandemic, 65 percent of Dell workers engaged in teleworking. The county also encourages teleworking, offering all eligible employees the option to create a flexible work plan.

## **Key Drivers**

Due to increased access to technology, barriers to teleworking have largely disappeared. Teleworking is also driven by environmental concerns. From 2015 to 2019, 67.8 percent of those employed in San Mateo County drove alone to work on a regular basis. By early 2023, this had decreased to 61.5 percent (significantly less than the national average, 73.2 percent).

## **Key Factors for Success**

In order to assure success, a teleworking program should be supported by adequate human resources to plan an effective pilot program, train employees and managers, and continually evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

## **Key Obstacles**

There are many misconceptions about teleworking and flexible work schedules that can hinder their implementation. One is that employees are not working when they are not being observed in the office. In reality, many teleworkers get more work done at home than when in the office. Another is that it is difficult to manage employees without face-to-face contact. Managers can communicate expectations and manage their workers through online platforms. Finally, some employers worry about never seeing their employees, but teleworking need not be full time. Many teleworkers split their time at home and the office, allowing employers to benefit from both teleworking and in-office interaction.

There are also other obstacles that aren't misconceptions. For instance, teleworking can result in isolation of employees as they lack in-person conversation and impromptu meetings. Virtual lunches or coffee breaks and frequent check-in meetings can help provide space for interaction and innovation. In addition, teleworking can make it difficult to separate work and personal life.

## **Timeline**

San Mateo County recommends allowing six to 10 months to implement a solid telework program. Here is a sample schedule:

Phase 1: Planning Phase (One-Three Months)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain top-level support</li> <li>• Establish a cross-functional project team</li> <li>• Designate a telework coordinator</li> <li>• Gather baseline data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish measurable telework program goals</li> <li>• Develop an implementation plan</li> <li>• Determine what resources will be required</li> <li>• Develop telework policy and agreement</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Implementation Phase (Four-Six Months)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training/orientation for employees and managers</li> <li>• Select participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch program</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Evaluation Phase (One Month)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct post-implementation assessment (interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups)</li> <li>• Compile and analyze results, prepare reports/briefing materials</li> <li>• Communicate results</li> <li>• Determine next steps (phased expansion or termination)</li> </ul>	

Table 1: From the San Mateo County Telework and Flex-Schedules Toolkit

### Return on Investment

Global Workplace Analytics has developed an online calculator that estimates potential benefits from telework. Its models are based on extensive research of more than 5,000 workplace studies and reports. The calculator shows that 10 employees earning \$80,000 who work remotely for three days a week would save the employer about \$136,000 a year.

### References and Resources

- John Ford, Executive Director, Commute.org, john@commute.org
- [Telework savings calculator](#) by Global Workplace Analytics
- [San Mateo County Telework Guide](#)
- [Remote Work Policy Clearinghouse](#) by Bay Area Air Management Quality District (state and local policies and guides)
- [Virtual Telework Fundamentals Training Courses](#)  
Chiu, Allyson. [“How a Four-Day Workweek Could Be Better for the Climate.”](#) Washington Post, August 8, 2022.
- Villegas, Paulins, and Hannah Knowles. [“Iceland Tested a Four-Day Workweek.”](#) Washington Post, July 7, 2021

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