

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

Telecommuting Policy for Staff

Telecommuting is a work arrangement in which some or all of the work is performed at an off-site location such as the home or in office space near home. Communication may be by one of several means, such as phone, modem, fax, and pager. Equipment may be owned and maintained by the employee or by the SBCCOG. The Executive Director has the authority to establish telecommuting arrangements and will consider request on a case-by-case basis. However, arrangements will only be authorized when it is in the best interest of the SBCCOG to do so.

If an employee is interested in telecommuting, the following steps should be followed:

1. The employee should initiate the request.
2. When the employee initiates the request, the employee should complete the checklist below:

Developing a Proposal for a Telecommuting Agreement

Determine what arrangement would best meet your needs:

- ✓ Where do you propose to work (home, alternate site)
- ✓ What schedule would you like (days and hours in the office, days and hours at telecommuting site)
- ✓ Which of your duties do you propose to perform at the telecommuting site? Which do you propose to perform in the department
- ✓ If only a minor adjustment can be made to your work arrangements, what adjustment would be most valuable to you (Examples: telecommuté one day a week; be available to come in on short notice; suspend telecommuting during busiest times of the year).

Anticipate what problems this arrangement may cause for the organization. (Include the effect on your own assignment and how your role affects others, both within the organization and externally.)

Try to work out potential solutions to these concerns:

- ✓ How will you communicate with your supervisor, co-workers, clients
- ✓ How will materials be kept readily available to those who need access
- ✓ How will you be able to respond to emergencies or other unexpected events
- ✓ How will you assure the security of employer materials and equipment
- ✓ Can you provide a workplace that is as safe as your employer work site, so as to minimize the likelihood of injuries

Outline ways in which your proposed arrangement might benefit the organization.

- ✓ Will service hours be extended?
- ✓ Will you be more productive? In what ways, and how will this be measured
- ✓ Will your department be able to free up equipment and space

Come up with a plan that addresses your own concerns and, to the extent that you can, those you anticipate from your supervisor, co-workers, and clients.

Request a meeting with your supervisor to explain what arrangements you would like and why. Discuss possibilities with your supervisor; actively listen and be prepared to revise your plan. (Flexibility goes both ways!)

Suggest a trial period of X months.

Develop a plan and timetable for monitoring the effectiveness of the arrangement.

3. If and when the Executive Director agrees to a telecommuting arrangement, the department should complete a formal, written agreement, using the Telecommuting Guidelines and the Model Telecommuting Agreement.

4. Once all required signatures have been obtained, the employee should be given a copy of the document, and the original should be maintained by the employer.

5. As questions arise, they should be addressed with the Executive Director or designee.

Telecommuting Guidelines

1. A telecommuting agreement should be voluntary. No employee should be required to telecommute.

2. The arrangement must be in the best interests of the employer. It should benefit--or at least not cause significant problems--for the employer as well as the employee. In evaluating benefits to the employer, these are some factors to consider:

- Does the nature of the work lend itself to telecommuting?

Jobs that entail working alone or working with equipment which can be kept at the alternate work site are often suitable for telecommuting.

Jobs that require physical presence to perform effectively are normally not suitable for telecommuting.

- What potential costs and savings are expected?

Space is often saved. However, juggling shared space among several part-timers may be difficult, especially if there is much turnover.

Equipment costs may be saved at the office (as when existing equipment is freed up for use by others). However, costs may be incurred at the alternate work site, depending on the nature of the agreement. For example, the department may need to buy, or support the costs of maintaining, a computer, modem, fax, or phone lines.

Staffing costs may be saved if the arrangement helps the department to recruit or retain a valued employee, or if the employee becomes more productive as a result of the new work arrangement. (Employees often produce more if they are freed from constant interruptions.) On the other hand, some work requires constant interaction with coworkers. In addition, telecommuting by one employee may affect the workload or the productivity of others.

- Is the employee a good candidate for telecommuting?

Telecommuting during the probationary period is not usually a good idea, because of the need to clarify job responsibilities, establish relationships with co-workers and clients, and assess suitability for continued employment.

Employees who have performance problems, or who require close supervision, are not good candidates for telecommuting.

Some employees are not comfortable with physical isolation from other employees, or do not work well independently, or cannot create a home work space that is safe (for them and for employer equipment and files) and is free from distractions.

Sometimes employees who telecommute feel that they are "out of the loop" and are overlooked when it comes to various kinds of workplace opportunities. (For this reason, and others, telecommuting should not normally be done more than two or three days a week.)

3. The focus in telecommuting arrangements must be on results. The supervisor should communicate in advance what assignments or tasks are appropriate to be performed at the telecommuting site, and what assessment techniques will be used to measure success in meeting performance standards.

4. The agreement should be as specific as possible. It should include:

- Days and hours the employee is expected to be working in the office
- Hours the employee is expected to be working and reachable at the telecommuting site
- Methods of contact (such as dedicated phone line, voice mail, modem, fax, beeper, etc.)
- Times and frequency of contact (in both directions)
- Who owns and maintains required equipment and supplies
- Who pays for on-going expenses, such as phone lines

- A statement that the employee agrees to maintain a safe work environment, and that the employee agrees to hold the employer harmless for injury to others at the telecommuting location
- A statement that the employee agrees to provide a secure location for employer-owned equipment and materials, and will not use, or allow others to use, such equipment for purposes other than employer business; and that the employer is entitled to reasonable access to its equipment and materials
- A statement that management retains the right to modify the agreement on a temporary basis as a result of business necessity (for example, the employee may be required to come to the office on a particular day), or as a result of an employee request supported by the supervisor
- A statement that the arrangement is voluntary, and may be terminated at any time by either party, with specified notice

5. The agreement should be in writing and should be signed and dated by the employee, the supervisor, and the Executive Director. A copy should be given to the employee; the original should be kept in the employee's file.

Attachment: Model Telecommuting Agreement