



King County

Alternative Work Arrangements Guide:

**A Reference for Managers and Employees
Considering Alternative Work Schedules
and
Telecommuting**

**King County Human Resources Division
Department of Executive Services
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Alternative Work Arrangements Guide

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I. OVERVIEW

King County is committed to providing an environment that encourages the use of Alternate Work Arrangements (AWA) where appropriate, in order to attract and retain a high performing and motivated workforce, reduce costs, assist in the mitigation of commute and traffic congestion, better address work and family demands in order to optimize effective use of work time, and further the goals of local, state, and national policies and regulations such as the Washington State Clean Air Act and the Commute Trip Reduction program. AWA includes both alternative work schedules (AWS) and telecommuting.

King County supports AWA where the needs of the public and the organization can be met; and encourages managers/supervisors, labor unions and eligible employees to work together to seek effective ways to implement AWA whenever possible

This guide augments and references existing county Executive Policies PER 18-1 Alternative Work Schedules and PER 18-4 Telecommuting Policy, which serve as the official guiding documents.

Benefits and Challenges of Alternative Working Arrangements

Benefits for King County

- Enhanced recruitment and retention of highly qualified employees
- Allowing supervisors and managers to focus on management of outcomes and results
- Improved continuity of operations in the event of natural disasters and inclement weather
- Additional time dedicated to uninterrupted work on detailed projects
- Motivate employees and potentially enhancing productivity by increasing work/life balance
- Reduces commuting during peak hours which positively impacts the region and the environment by reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions

Benefits for the Employee

- Reduces time spent commuting or commuting during peak hours
- Reduces commuting costs
- Improved job satisfaction by giving employees more options to balance work and family demands

Challenges for King County and Its Employees

- Assuring employee performance and productivity and effective management outside of normal business hours and at off-site locations
- Equipment needs (e.g., technology)
- Employee safety (e.g., ergonomic and physical environment) while telecommuting
- Security of data (privacy and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA))

II. ALTERNATIVE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS in a UNIONIZED ENVIRONMENT

It is important to review collective bargaining agreements when considering AWA requests. Supervisors should consult with their department Human Resources personnel while considering approval of an AWA. Human Resources staff will closely coordinate with Labor Relations in order to ensure compliance with applicable collective bargaining agreements. Employees are also encouraged to contact their union representatives about appropriate procedures for requesting an AWA. Managers/supervisors, employees and union representatives are encouraged to work together in the planning of an AWA so that each understands and shares responsibility for the effective working of the revised work arrangements.

III. ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENTS DEFINITIONS

Alternative Work Schedules (AWS)

These definitions are taken from King County policies and applicable collective bargaining agreements. Different terms may be used in your work unit.

“Alternative work schedules” are an arrangement whereby employees may modify their regular work day and/or their work week as defined in Executive policy PER 18-1 (AEP) Alternative Work Schedules.

“Fixed flex” means a work schedule divided into "core" time, during which the employee must be at work, and "flex-time bands" at either end of the core time, during which employees may adjust the times they begin and end their workday, subject to prior approval.

"Full flex" means a work week consisting of the hours (either 35 or 40) and days (five in a seven-day period) that would be worked by an employee on a regular schedule, but in which the daily hours worked may vary from day to day in order to meet the professional requirements of the position.

"Compressed work week" means a work week of fewer than five days in a seven-day period or fewer than ten days in a 14-day period.

Telecommuting

Telecommuting is an arrangement that enables employees to conditionally work from home or an alternative worksite under the guidelines of Executive policy PER 18-4 (AEP) Telecommuting Policy. Employees must be able to complete work assignments, communicate with their supervisor, co-workers, and clients, and send and receive work items between home and the workplace via telephone and/or computer to make such an arrangement effective.

Telecommuting can be an ongoing arrangement or it can be used on an as-needed basis. In considering potential telecommuting arrangements, managers and supervisors must ensure the business needs of the work unit are met. Within the existing policies, departments may develop their own guidelines for determining if any equipment or services needed to telecommute will be provided by the employer or the employee

IV. Alternative Working Arrangements Considerations

The following topics should be considered by employees and supervisors when considering an alternative work arrangement.

Customer Service

- Does the position require only minimal face-to-face interaction with internal or external customers, co-workers or project workgroups during the times proposed for telecommuting?
- How would supervisors, co-workers and/or clients be affected by the employee working at home and how would related issues be mitigated? How would service be affected?

Productivity

- How would group and individual productivity be affected? If so, how?
- Can work tasks be successfully accomplished away from the normal worksite?

Logistics, Equipment and Costs

- Is there access to a computer, high speed internet access, appropriate security software, and other necessary materials required for working from home?
- Does the remote work site have a safe and suitable work environment that is conducive for accomplishing work assignments?
- If applicable, have child or dependent care arrangements been made for the period the employee is telecommuting?

Communication

- How would necessary internal coordination, consultation, work product standardization and communication be established and maintained?
- How would the employee communicate effectively with the supervisor, co-workers, support staff, and clients during telecommuting periods?
- How would the employee respond to telephone calls or emails in a timely manner?

Work Schedule & Products

- How would coverage for the work unit be affected if the employee is on a different work schedule than co-workers?
- How would work hours and products be tracked?
- Are there specific times during the day or week that the employee must be at work? Can an AWA be structured so these times are covered?
- If workload demands require, would employee be available to report to centrally located worksite instead of telecommuting worksite?

V. PLANNING

When considering AWA, it is crucial to plan for how the work will be accomplished in order to ensure that the business needs are met within the AWA environment

There are four categories of characteristics that should be considered when implementing an effective alternative work arrangement program: job characteristics, employee characteristics, manager/supervisor characteristics, and home environment characteristics.

1. Job Characteristics - Jobs best suited to AWA are those that either regularly or sporadically:
 - a. Require independent work
 - b. Do not require on-going face-to-face interaction and a high level of colleague coordination
 - c. Require quiet and minimal interruptions
 - d. Result in a specific, measurable work product
 - e. Can be monitored by the output, not solely by the time spent doing the job
2. Employee Characteristics - Individuals best suited to AWA are those who have demonstrated that they:
 - a. Can effectively work independently
 - b. Are self-motivated and flexible
 - c. Are knowledgeable about their job
 - d. Are dependable and conscientious
 - e. Consistently maintain a satisfactory or above average performance record
 - f. Are organized
 - g. Have demonstrated good communication skills
3. Manager/Supervisor Characteristics - Significant expansion of the use of AWA may require major changes in the work environment and the way work is produced and managed. In order to help increase the success of the expansion, managers should take steps to:

- a. Empower their employees
 - b. Develop definitive work products and measures
 - c. Focus on managing by results or output rather than solely by time spent working
 - d. Encourage and participate in open feedback and communication with employees regarding the work and the AWA
 - e. Facilitate creative problem solving
 - f. Effectively plan and organize their work and the work of subordinates to aid in the success of the work accomplished through AWA
 - g. Clearly define expectations and consistently and fairly hold staff accountable for meeting work requirements
4. Home Environment Characteristics – The home office environment should be suitable for telework. The home workplace should be:
- a. Secure from unintentional access. All King County equipment and documents must be secured and information must be stored out of view when not in use. County equipment or software is to be used for county purposes only and household members should not have access to their use.
 - b. Free of background noise and distractions during work time. Is the employee able to discuss county business privately on the telephone without being heard by other people in the household?
 - c. Business focused. Telework should not be used a substitute for dependent care and necessary arrangements for dependent care have been made.
 - d. Safe, ergonomically appropriate, and provide an atmosphere conducive to a productive work environment. Information Technology staff should be consulted to ensure computer privacy and security issues are appropriately considered.

Determining Which Jobs Might Be a Good Fit for AWS

Jobs that may not be conducive to telecommuting may be conducive to AWS. These jobs may be those that include face-to-face customer contact as an essential duty during standard business hours (e.g., for example 8 am - 5 pm), where there is minimal staff for coverage, and/or other ongoing business needs that prevent working outside of core business hours. Also positions where employees may accomplish tasks outside of standard business hours may be conducive to AWS such as flexible or compressed schedules.

Determining Which Jobs Might Be a Good Fit for Telecommuting

While not all jobs can fit into a telecommuting arrangement, telecommuters can be equally or more productive than those who report to a predetermined work location on a daily basis. Following are some types of tasks that may effectively be done in a telecommuting work arrangement.

Examples of Telecommuting Tasks

- analysis
- auditing/editing reports
- computer programming
- conducting business by phone
- creating graphics
- data entry
- design work
- dictating/transcribing
- drafting
- maintaining databases
- preparing budgets
- preparing performance evaluations
- reading and reviewing
- researching
- sending/receiving email
- spreadsheet analysis
- word processing
- writing

Employees will find it easier to telecommute and managers/supervisors will find it easier to supervise, if the employee:

- Can meet internal and external client needs while telecommuting.
- Have clear work objectives, with timelines and clear expectations which are measurable.
- Is provided feedback on productivity and performance on a consistent and regular basis.
- Has well-defined tasks to accomplish for telecommuting days.
- Benefits from quiet or uninterrupted time and can work independently.
- Can schedule face-to-face meetings on specified days, and have ability to schedule use of resources and equipment that must stay at the office.

Initiating, Reviewing, Renewing, and Terminating Agreements

Alternative Working Arrangements agreements should be reviewed periodically (.e.g. every three or six months), and at the expiration of an agreement to ensure that they are successful for both the work unit and the employee and to determine if alterations are needed.

Upon the expiration of an agreement, the employee may request renewal of the arrangement per applicable policies and/or collective bargaining agreement.

Terminations or adjustments to an agreement may be made at the request of the department supervisor, manager, director or employee per applicable policies and/or collective bargaining agreement. Reasons for adjustments may include but are not limited to situations where work plans have changed, performance concerns or general work unit absenteeism exist. Adjustments to agreements must be documented.