**Pitt IT: Working Effectively in a Remote/On-Campus Environment**

**BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF AND SUPERVISORS**

Pitt IT is helping to establish a hybrid virtual and physical workplace where staff work productively in any location, anywhere in the world. Such a program benefits staff by increasing morale, reducing or eliminating commute times, and improving work/life balance. The University benefits by increased productivity, the ability to hire staff in other cities who are unable to relocate, and by reducing demand for costly on-campus workspaces.

A successful hybrid on-campus/remote environment requires everyone to recognize that colleagues, supervisors, and team members may be anywhere. Culture change requires time and commitment. If everyone commits to knowing who colleagues and team members are and seeking them out virtually rather than only physically, the new environment will be successful in Pitt IT and a model for remote work throughout the University.

# Adjusting to a Virtual Workplace

Everyone needs to recognize that adapting to a new work model requires rethinking current practices. For example, meeting organizers need to plan for remote participants. Supervisors need to plan to evaluate performance of staff they may rarely see in person. Remote workers need to think about how to “be present” by reaching out to on campus colleagues.

Here a few other things to think about:

1. Communication between employee and supervisor is critical to success. This communication involves three phases:
   * **Planning** for remote work; agreeing on how performance will be measured and evaluated; and establishing availability, communication channels, and related issues.
   * **Monitoring** includes assessing not only performance, but how well the remote work arrangement is working out.
   * **Adjusting** to changing work and project assignments, customer needs, and other factors to ensure success.
2. Recognizing that remote work is not for a privileged few, but for anyone who wishes to participate and whose duties and job circumstances allow.
   * Most staff should be able to work remotely at least some of the time.
   * Some circumstances may require remote workers to be present on campus.
   * Some staff whose work generally requires them to be on campus may be able to work remotely on an occasional basis.

Centrally supported tools such as Microsoft Teams or Skype enable staff to be virtually present on campus.

1. “Remote” does not always mean working from home or an off-campus location. On campus staff can reduce travel time to meetings by using the same communication tools as those working off-site.
2. Remote work does not require expensive resources or a private office. A computer, phone, and Internet access are the tools needed, along with a reasonably quiet workspace.
   * Staff with specialized software needs can connect to virtual desktops.
   * Pulse Secure (sremote.pitt.edu) provides VPN access when needed.
   * Laptops provide flexibility for those whose remote work locations change or those who frequently come to campus. Docking stations can be used when working in remote or shared on campus spaces.

Job Exceptions to Remote Work Program

Certain jobs may be ineligible for remote work. It is important to understand that it is the job, not the team member, that is partially or entirely ineligible.

* New employees may be required to work on campus during provisional periods at the supervisor’s discretion unless hired to work remotely.
* Employees subject to performance improvement plans are required by University policy to work on campus.

# Effective Planning for Remote Work

Transitioning to remote work requires thoughtful planning. The following are some important considerations:

**Plan to “Go” to Work Each Day**

Remote workers often report greater success when they dress and prepare for work as if they were leaving home for the office. The best mindset is that you are going to work even if you never leave your home. Get dressed, be prepared to meet colleagues virtually in videoconferences just as if you were meeting in person, eliminate distractions, and begin your workday.

**Availability of Internet Service**

Skype, Teams, and other unified communication tools require reasonable bandwidth. You should test the service at your planned remote work location to determine if there is adequate bandwidth to support your work.

**Make Your Presence Known**

Use Skype or Teams status and location settings to keep others informed of where you are. For example, your status information should be kept “green” to show you are available whenever possible so others know they can call or instant message you. For the virtual office environment to be effective, everyone should use status and location information whether or not they work remotely.

*See the help sheet “How to Set Your Status and Location in Teams and Skype” for more information.*

**Freedom from Unwanted Distractions**

It is not necessary for everyone to work in a soundproof environment; however, freedom from unwanted distractions is important. For example, it may be difficult to participate effectively in meetings if you or others are distracted by excessive background noise, just as when you are working on campus.

**Suitability of Equipment and Software**

If you are planning to use a personally owned desktop or laptop, the machine must meet acceptable security standards including anti-virus software. You can download and install Symantec Endpoint Protection free-of-charge from software.pitt.edu. University-owned equipment should already meet security standards, but may need to be configured differently to work properly in a remote setting.

If you were accustomed to a desktop equipped with dual monitors on campus, you may find it challenging to downsize to a laptop. Consider a docking station or home desktop setup that allows you to have multiple displays.

If your team uses specialized software, certain packages may not run on a remote computer. Pulse Secure (sremote.pitt.edu) may resolve some issues; others may require connection to a remote desktop. Contact the Technology Help Desk at 412-624-HELP (4357) for assistance, if needed.

**Potential Equipment Configurations**

1. Personally-owned computer with needed software installed. Many non-technical staff can successfully work remotely using a home machine because no special configuration is required for access to general productivity software such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Skype or Teams, etc.

Unless needed for access to restricted resources, staff using personal computers are not required to log in to the PittNet VPN (Pulse Secure) client.

1. University-owned desktop configured properly for remote use. Staff accustomed to using dual monitors or who do not have a dedicated computer for remote work use may be provided with a University-owned desktop at the supervisor’s discretion.
2. University-provided laptop. This may be the best option for staff who will work both on campus or remotely or in multiple locations. Docking stations with external monitors may be useful.

Equipment needs for staff vary by department and team and should be part of the planning discussion between employee and supervisor before remote work begins. Satisfying remote work equipment requests will depend upon determination of need and availability of funding.

# Scheduling the Workday

The University’s standard workday is Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Remote work offers considerable flexibility as the commute is generally eliminated or shortened. Although flexibility exists, remote workers are required to complete all work assignments as scheduled and to be available for interaction with team members, supervisors, vendors, and others. Effective scheduling is critical to success.

* Keep your calendar up to date. Skype and Teams draw on calendar information to show your virtual presence to others. Presence information is how others will know whether they can reach you by phone, instant message, or email if needed.
* Use the presence indication features in Skype and Teams to give additional information. For example, at minimum, set your location to “Remote” so others know you are not on campus when your presence indicator is green or yellow.
* Block out times on your schedule when you are not available for phone calls. On the other hand, make sure you allow windows of time for others to get in touch with you.
* If you are working a nonstandard workday, make others aware using your calendar’s workday feature. Set your workday to the days and times you and your supervisor agree that you will work so that others spend less time “finding” you.

Remote workers quickly discover the advantage of being able to focus without people dropping by to chat or other office interruptions. There are also drawbacks:

* Lack of impromptu conversations or “cube wall chats” that lead to synergy and new ideas. Remote workers and their on-campus colleagues need to be intentional about reaching out to individuals and teams.
* Isolation can lead to alienation and feeling like you are not part of the team. Video calls with others on a regular basis reduce isolation and are important to ensure colleagues meaningfully connect with one another.
* “Out of sight, out of mind” problem among on-campus colleagues. Office-based workers need to remember to schedule meetings for physical and virtual conference rooms so that remote workers are in the loop on what is going on. In a remote work environment, no meeting should be scheduled solely for in-person attendees unless it can be clearly demonstrated that all participants must attend in person. If so, this information must be communicated to remote workers with enough lead time to allow them to arrange to be present. Only a small minority of meetings should fall into this category, so the use of videoconferencing is preferred.

Culture change is a critical part of successful remote work programs. Everyone must commit to adapting to the remote environment.

*For further information on strategies to collaborate more effectively in a remote work environment, visit the Pitt OnDemand Training (LinkedIn Learning) course on Working Remotely at* [***https://www.linkedin.com/learning/working-remotely-***](https://www.linkedin.com/learning/working-remotely-2015/welcome?u=2252458)[***2015/welcome?u=2252458***](https://www.linkedin.com/learning/working-remotely-2015/welcome?u=2252458) *(Pitt Passport login required).*

**Performance Monitoring and Evaluations**

Part of the virtual office culture change means that the way in which productivity is measured may need to change. Exempt staff are expected to complete work assignments, projects, and other tasks regardless of the amount of time required at the agreed-upon salary. Measurable work output is the basis for evaluation, not necessarily hours spent on any given task.

Evaluation of exempt staff means that the supervisor and employee should agree on the expected work product, which can be measured and evaluated according to department standards. The emphasis is not on time spent, but on what is completed on time, the quality of the work done, and whether or not the staff member exceeds those expectations.

Evaluation of hourly staff is no different whether the staff member works on campus or remotely. Pay for hourly staff is tied to the hours worked. Remote and on campus staff members are required to be on time for work, available throughout the 7.5-hour workday as scheduled, with an unpaid hour for lunch. “Presence” for work means that the employee is available, with reasonable breaks, to complete assigned tasks.

**Continuous Improvement**

Creating a virtual environment for the department should not diminish productivity, but enhance it as we are able to hire highly qualified team members regardless of where they live. The key to success is that teams may be spread out over a wide area, but the technology and resources exist for everyone to work as if all staff were on campus. Working together as one organization, we will advance the vision for the department and the University’s strategic goals.