

Flexible Work Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some various definitions related to flexible work.

- **Flexible Work** includes professional scheduling, overtime compensatory time and telecommuting which are further defined below.
- **Professional Scheduling** is available for exempt employees who perform work outside core business hours. Requests for occasional remote work may be made via email.
- **Overtime Compensatory Time** is available to non-exempt employees who work more than 40 hours per week. Requests for occasional remote work may be made via email.
- **Occasional Remote work** is usually a short-term arrangement of one or more days away from the office location. Requests for occasional remote work may be made via email.
- **Telecommuting** is one or more days of regular work away from the office location. A [Telecommuting Agreement](#) will need to be completed.

1. I am a faculty member who would like to work/write from home on Monday and Friday. I have no problem signing the contract, I am just not sure I will be working from home on all Mondays and Fridays as my schedule varies depending on meetings, conferences, teaching, etc. What would you advise? Do I even need to sign a work from home contract?

Answer: Work with your supervisor to determine if telecommuting is possible. Telecommuting is one or more days of regular work away from the office location. A formal telecommuting agreement is accomplished between the employee and supervisor. The telecommuting agreement must be reviewed at least annually or as needed.

2. What about those of us who already filled out a contract with main campus and have been working from home?

Answer: The telecommuting agreement should be reviewed with your supervisor to determine if it is still applicable. If needed, a new/updated telecommuting agreement should be re-accomplished.

3. Which other Universities did you check with to see if they had similar policies?

Answer: Alabama, Alabama A&M, Colorado State University, NC State, Oklahoma State, Kansas State University, Louisiana State University, Ohio State University, Oklahoma State University, Oregon State University, Texas A&M, University of Arkansas (Division of Agriculture), University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, University of Nebraska, University of Washington, and Virginia Tech...

4. If this is truly going to be a viable option for the future, this seems like a great way to recruit more high-level candidates for future positions in Extension. We are currently losing out on many high-level people that are going to work for other organizations and this seems like a great way to help level the playing field. Will we be able to advertise this to attract those candidates for agents, specialists, etc.?

Answer: The ability to telecommute will be evaluated based upon each position. The alternative work location will be listed in the job announcement. The flexible work benefits can always be discussed during the interview process.

5. What if I hire someone who is an internal transfer? Do they still need to be in the office for the first 6 months?

Answer: If an internal transfer has an existing telecommuting agreement it should be reviewed to determine if it is applicable to the new position. Under most circumstances, employees new to the University will need to be in their current position for their probationary period before a telecommuting agreement can be implemented.

6. Will employees be able to initiate this review?

Answer: The review timeline is outlined in the telecommuting agreement.

7. How does the Chancellor's announcement about the possibility of working a four, 10-hour day, weekly schedule fit into this?

Answer: Given the nature of Extension work, i.e., summer camps, field work, etc., it may be difficult for our employees to work a 4/10 schedule during the summer. While Extension may not be able to formally implement a 4/10 schedule, UT Policy and the Flexible Work Guidelines do allow for adjusting work schedules. Supervisors will have to consider the needs of the county,

clientele, and individual employees to determine if a work schedule adjustment is possible.

8. Does TSU have any guidelines related to this for its Extension employees?

Answer: These guidelines do not apply to TSU. TSU does not have a flexible work policy nor guidelines. TSU Extension administration will look at each request case by case basis. Minor, day to day, flex time will be left with the local county director to decide.

9. Is this just for agents who work during extended hours/overtime or after the core hours?

Answer: Flexible scheduling applies to agents, and overtime compensation applies to non-exempt staff. Situations can refer to extra hours associated with work events such as conferences, meetings, trainings, 4H events, etc.

10. State specialists are often seen on zoom from their homes and have found it difficult to get ahold of them. How will this make it easier to get ahold of a state specialist.

Answer: Employees working remotely should be as accessible as they were in an office location. Each department head/director should make sure that their staff are fully accessible during working hours.

11. Extension Agents would not be able to telecommute so there was no reason to complete the telecommuting form. Is this true?

Answer: Regular telecommuting will be rare. The ability to work remotely will depend upon position duties/responsibilities, however; we encourage supervisors to allow both non-exempt and exempt flexibility as much as possible. Supervisors should work with staff to provide opportunities within the flexible work guidelines.

12. When speaking to equality, how are county Extension offices going to treat exempt and non-exempt staff the same when talking about occasional remote work? Especially when some job duties cannot be done remotely.

Answer: The ability to work remotely will depend upon position duties/responsibilities, however; we encourage supervisors to allow both non-exempt and exempt flexibility as much as possible.

13. If an employee has planned and approved leave, then works a LONG week beforehand, for example 4H camp, can they reduce their leave to compensate? Why or why not?

Answer: Flexible scheduling is not intended to generate leave days. Camp and leave are both scheduled ahead of time. Employees should work with their supervisor to plan in advance for flexible work needs.

14. How many hours of professional scheduling will be given to agents for our upcoming Extension conference? My county director is new and does not know. It seems that most counties have different perspectives on this. I have children and overnight stays take time away from my family. It would be nice if there was a consistent formula for events that are able to have a consistent formula. This would remove 95 different perspectives and provide a standard for all.

Answer: Work with your supervisor to determine what would be appropriate for your situation.

15. Will there be a flexible work option for the Extension Employee Conference in November? I saw something in one email about an option to join virtually. Many employees have family commitments (small children and other at home responsibilities). Mandated conferences like this and the New Employee Conference are currently the biggest turn-off to new Extension employees because family is a higher priority than work.

Answer: We understand that families are important to us, however; there are certain work-related obligations that are the expectations of every employee in the organization. Work with your supervisor to determine if a flexible work arrangement after the conference will be possible.

16. We work for the people in our county, and we should be in our offices like every other county employee. If I am at home my farmers think I am off. I just don't see how this will work for an educational organization that works face to face with people and keeping the office open regularly. We already do this for a very limited amount of time,

just every now and then, but do not like the idea of someone working from home all day on a regular basis.

Answer: Local needs of the county government must be taken into consideration before any type of flexible work is allowed.

17. Does telecommuting apply to support staff also?

Answer: Regular telecommuting will be rare. The ability to work remotely will depend upon position duties/responsibilities, however; we encourage supervisors to allow both non-exempt and exempt flexibility as much as possible. Supervisors should work with non-exempt staff to provide opportunities within the flexible work guidelines.

18. In county offices with one administrative assistant, can you provide examples of how the administrative assistant should be included in telecommuting?

Answer: Regular telecommuting for employees will be rare. The ability to telecommute will depend upon position duties/responsibilities, however; we encourage supervisors to allow both non-exempt and exempt flexibility as much as possible with occasional remote work. Supervisors should work with administrative support personnel to provide opportunities within the flexible work guidelines.

19. The training mentioned that work schedules/locations would be assessed periodically. Will this be something formal (like done during performance review) or something more informal (like if there are work issues)?

Answer: Yes, it should be addressed at least annually, as needed, and/or during performance reviews and as needed as performance issues arise.

20. Several of us have the same actual UT job title, but our actual job functions are completely different. How is this being addressed?

Answer: Job titles are meant to be broader, whereas the position description would list job functions. The ability to work remotely will depend upon position duties/responsibilities, however; we encourage supervisors to allow both non-exempt and exempt flexibility as much as possible.

21. How will this flexible work schedule be decided? does the county director approve it? What are the guidelines? What if the county director denies it?

Answer: The supervisor will decide whether a flexible work schedule will be granted. The guidelines can be seen: <https://eesd.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/242/2022/05/Flexible-Work.pdf> There is no formal appeals process. The supervisor needs to be transparent on the reason that the work from home will not be granted.

22. How do we handle the situation when our county director will not let us work from home? This can be by them not telling their employees the full details of the situation or simply acting negative as if this opportunity doesn't apply to us.

Answer: The supervisor needs to be transparent on the reason that the work from home will not be granted.

23. As a county extension agent, if my county director is not allowing professional scheduling by agents, what do I need to do for this to be remedied?

Answer: The supervisor will decide whether a flexible work schedule will be granted. The guidelines can be seen: <https://eesd.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/242/2022/05/Flexible-Work.pdf> There is no formal appeals process. The supervisor needs to be transparent on the reason that the work from home will not be granted.

24. Is there a limit on the number of days per month that an employee can work remotely?

Answer: While there is no official number of days, final approval will be with your supervisor, department head, or director.

25. Does it need to be equitable among employees? If I give one agent a remote day, do I need to give the others a remote day? I'm just trying to wrap my head about not creating a workplace full of animosity.

Answer: Circumstances can vary from unit to unit. Where possible, all eligible full-time employees should be treated equally.

26. It was noted during the presentation that Zoom is not to be used for staff meetings - is this correct? I have co-workers who have locations outside the office.

Answer: If your supervisor wants to hold an in-person staff meeting, everyone needs to come in-person to the meeting.

27. What's the process supervisors need to take if there are issues with employees working remotely? Will there be guidance for how to deal with issues like missing deadlines, not communicating (not responding to emails or phone calls), etc.? Maybe it's not enough for a PIP (performance improvement plan) but there is starting to be a pattern of issues.

Answer: Address these issues as you would with any performance issues. Telecommuting is a privilege. Those privileges can be revoked at any time as deemed by the supervisor. Consult with your regional director, department head, etc., for further guidance.

28. Will there be guidance for how to deal with issues resulting from sharing offices?

Answer: UT Extension will not be providing specific guidance on how to deal with issues resulting from sharing offices. Supervisors should deal with issues as they would with any other employee disciplinary issue. Consult with your regional director, department head, etc., for further guidance.

29. For new employees, what happens after the first 6 months? At the end of the probationary period is that when we discuss work location moving forward?

Answer: Work location is determined upon hire. It will be rare for an employee to move work locations. After the probationary period have a discussion with the supervisor regarding flexible work arrangements.

30. It was said that the employee should be accessed to the office within 30 minutes if using professional scheduling. Is that still true or can you explain further?

Answer: This is not a UT Extension expectation. If an employee is utilizing Occasional Remote Work or is telecommuting the expectation is that they are accessible as if they were in an office location.

31. Does anyone check or compare annual or sick time since we put it in ourselves? some people are not putting in the time they take off and now have more leave time than ever before. We need to go back to the old way of putting in your leave time so everyone will not abuse it.

Answer: Supervisors are responsible to ensure employees are properly accounting for their time.

32. The only question that would concern me, those that will be taking advantage of Flexible Work, will they receive the same salary or pay rate as those that are out in the field?

Answer: These guidelines do not come with salary adjustments as the work duties will be the same. There is an expectation of at least a 40-hour work week for all full-time employees.

33. How are supervisors supposed to make sure that employees are working the full time (8hrs) they are telecommuting?

Answer: Supervisors set expectations and accountability methods with employees. Some methods include weekly meetings, reports, accomplishment of assignments, etc.

34. I attended the webinar, and it doesn't sound like anything new at all. It will all be at the discretion of the county director.

Answer: Correct. UTK policy already allows for flexibility in work schedules.

35. Will there be considerations made based on the degree of technological needs (and know-how) of shared workspaces?

Answer: Discuss technical needs with your shared workspace co-worker and your supervisor.

36. If I work in a county that has unreliable broadband will a hotspot or other accommodation be provided for me? Who will pay for this service? My county, my region, or other?

Answer: The employee will be responsible for providing communication access to the internet and phone. The internet and phone must be sufficient to allow the employee to complete all job-related activities. A communications stipend (in accordance with fiscal policy) may be paid to the remote employee if funds are available.

37. Is it possible to order a second monitor for working at home?

Answer: Work with your supervisor to determine equipment needs.