

Frequently asked questions about Telework:

For Yukon government
supervisors (p. 1-6) and
employees (p.7-10)



August 2009

Yukon
Public Service Commission

For Supervisors

S1. What is telework?

Telework is a type of alternate work arrangement in which an employee works from another location (usually their home) for part or all of their work week. Telework is neither a requirement nor an entitlement; rather, it is both voluntary and subject to operational requirements.

S2. Does the Yukon government have a policy about telework?

Yes - the Telework Policy 3.12 and accompanying guidelines are part of the General Administration Manual, Volume 3. You can find these documents at: http://www.psc.gov.yk.ca/policy/gam_vol3.html

S3. Who is eligible to apply for a telework arrangement?

The policy and guidelines apply to all persons employed under the Yukon *Public Service Act* who have a minimum of one year service in their current position. Proposed telework arrangements must meet the criteria outlined in the guidelines with respect to the nature of the job, suitability of the employee and appropriateness of the teleworkplace.

S4. How does it work?

Telework arrangements can vary depending on the needs of work units and of individual employees. Employees may telework for all or part of their work week. Depending on employee needs and operational requirements, an employee may telework for certain periods of the year and return to the regular workplace for the remainder. Employees within a work unit may rotate telework schedules and share a common work space in the office. Hours of work and all other terms and conditions of employment continue to apply.

S5. What equipment does the department provide? Employees?

For security reasons, the department must provide a Yukon government computer (PC or laptop) and a locking file cabinet. Unless otherwise specified in the telework agreement, departments generally pay for phone and internet costs and pre-approved office supplies. Telework employees are required to cover the costs of any additional home utilities and to carry, at their expense, a minimum of \$1million in general liability insurance.

Departments who are contemplating a telework agreement will have to take into account any additional costs as part of their criteria for determining the feasibility of a telework request.

S6. Telework – what's in it for departments?

Under the right circumstances, telework can be a viable alternate working arrangement for both departments and employees. Studies have shown that employees who telework are often more focused and productive as they're better able to capitalize on peak personal productivity periods and avoid

workplace distractions. Research has also indicated that employees who telework may take less sick and personal leave as they're in a better position to cope with both personal and professional demands.

Telework can be an excellent solution for retaining experienced employees who may have a desire for greater work-life balance at different times in their lives. It can also be a practical way to free up office space and resources.

S7. How is telework compatible with providing excellent service the public?

Employers everywhere are faced with the challenge of finding and keeping skilled and experienced workers. Used appropriately, telework can be a good tool for retaining valuable employees who desire greater work-life balance. Keep in mind that a public service employee would only be considered for a telework arrangement where it can be demonstrated that service to the public will be maintained or improved. It's about the right employee, the right job and the right teleworkplace.

Telework has some big picture advantages too. It has been promoted in some jurisdictions as a positive "green" initiative by helping to reduce the number of commuters on the roads and contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions. Telework is also becoming increasingly linked with sound emergency preparedness planning as it may help ensure critical operations and services can be maintained during emergencies.

S8. What drawbacks may be associated with telework?

Telework is not for every job or every employee. If the right balance between personal and job suitability isn't achieved, there is a real potential for disruption in productivity and service delivery.

Some employees who try telework find they miss the interaction with their co-workers, are less able to focus at home or worry they'll be passed over for advancement opportunities ("out of sight, out of mind").

Some supervisors are unable to adjust to a management style based on performance outputs (i.e. *what* is done rather than *how* it's done) and have difficulty overcoming concerns from other employees about perceived benefits being granted to the telework employee. Depending on the situation, there may also be additional up-front costs (for both employees and departments) associated with establishing a teleworkplace.

As with any alternate work arrangement, the benefits need to outweigh the disadvantages – and the disadvantages must be manageable – if telework is to succeed.

S9. What types of jobs are best suited to telework?

While there are proven benefits associated with telework, it doesn't make sense for every job. In order to be considered for telework under the Yukon government's guidelines, the following criteria must be met.

- ✓ Service delivery will be maintained or improved.
- ✓ The work is compatible with an off-site location.
- ✓ The job duties can be completed without a lot of face-to-face contact.

- ✓ The work can be easily managed by evaluating results.

At the end of the day we are public servants and our jobs exist to provide service to the Yukon public – if telework impedes or is incompatible with providing the best possible services, then it's not an acceptable option.

S10. What makes an employee a good candidate for telework?

Just as not every job is right for telework, neither is every employee. Experience has shown that the best candidates for telework are those who have the right balance of:

- ✓ job experience – they've been on the job long enough to know the ins and outs;
- ✓ job performance – they are consistent, competent and high performing;
- ✓ being able to work independently – they are capable and comfortable working with little direct supervision; and
- ✓ personal suitability – they have proven themselves to be reliable and trustworthy.

Employees who have the best experience with telework are those who are self-motivated, good at maintaining lines of communication and able to establish a distraction-free work space within their home environment.

S11 How does the application process work?

Information about the application process is outlined in the document **Telework Proposals: A step by step process overview**, available from your HR director or on the PSC website at <http://www.psc.gov.yk.ca/employeescurrent/telework.html>.

Employees who are interested in teleworking are required to submit a written proposal to their supervisors outlining how they, the job and the proposed teleworkplace meet the requirements of the policy and guidelines.

As a supervisor, you should read the proposal in conjunction with the Telework policy and guidelines. Talk to your HR director if you are unsure about any aspects. Communicate your decision both in writing and in person to the employee.

If you decide to give Telework a try, you and the employee will complete a Telework Agreement (template attached to the guidelines) for review and approval by your HR director and Deputy Minister.

To assist PSC in evaluating the effectiveness of the Telework Policy, you will also need to fill out a Telework Proposal Tracking Form for each proposal that is approved or denied. The forms are located at <http://www.psc.gov.yk.ca/employeescurrent/telework.html>.

S12. If I say yes to one telework request everyone in my unit will want the same opportunity.

Flexible work arrangements are becoming increasingly popular with employees and employers and telework is no exception. Just as workplaces are adjusting for compressed work weeks, flex time, job shares etc., it may be possible to have more than one telework employee without negatively affecting workplace productivity. It may just take a little creative thinking.

Assuming that each position and each employee meet the criteria for telework, options may be to stagger telework schedules by days of the week or by the month. For example, employee "A" teleworks on Mondays and Tuesdays while employee "B" teleworks Wednesdays through Friday. (To make things even, they switch schedules periodically.) Alternately, three employees could go on telework rotations for four-month "shifts" throughout the year.

Options like these may make it possible for more than one employee to enjoy the benefits of telework and may even have the added bonus of freeing up space and resources by allowing two or more employees to share one on-site workspace. But don't forget – one of the driving factors in considering a telework request is operational requirements. As a supervisor, always ask yourself how many employees could feasibly telework without compromising your unit's service delivery.

S13. Can telework be used as a way to accommodate employees with disabilities?

Potentially, yes; however Telework in this context is separate from the disability accommodation process. The duty to accommodate continues to apply per GAM Policy 3.47 Accommodating Employees with Disabilities. Talk to your human resource director for more information about accommodation.

S14. Can telework be used as a way to balance work and dependent care responsibilities?

Telework may appeal to employees who seek better work-life balance; however working from home can't be used as a replacement for child care or other dependent care arrangements.

For example, parents may find telework helps them arrange their working hours to better coincide with the school day. Similarly, employees with elder care responsibilities may find a telework arrangement can reduce their daily commute, freeing up valuable time in the day for family responsibilities.

Telework employees must continue to satisfy all job requirements including hours of work and performance expectations, therefore they must have alternate dependent care arrangements in place during working hours.

S15. What if I decide not to approve a telework request?

Supervisors have the final say in approving or denying telework requests based on the criteria set out in the policy guidelines. Just because a particular position may be suited to telework doesn't mean that every employee will be and vice versa.

If you decide that telework is not a workable option, whether for operational or personal suitability reasons, discuss your rationale with the employee. If the issue is one of individual fit, talk to the employee about what he or she can work on. You could consider re-evaluating the telework request at a later date in conjunction with the regular performance evaluation process.

S16. How do I address the perception that one employee is receiving a benefit over others?

As with any issue affecting workplace morale, communication is key. While the final decision about approving flexible work arrangements rests with supervisors, you must communicate with the work unit as a whole prior to undertaking the telework arrangement. Explain to co-workers how the telework situation will be managed and give them an opportunity to voice their concerns.

Issues such as equitable distribution of workload, information sharing and accessibility are valid concerns that could potentially impact on other employees and the workplace as a whole. Concerns that relate to an individual employee's job performance (i.e. how do we know they're really working at home) or personal needs are confidential and more appropriately discussed between the supervisor and the telework employee. The earlier in the process supervisors address potential concerns within the work unit, the less likely they are to develop into future problems.

S17. How do I know that the telework employee is really working? (How do I manage an employee I can't see?)

One of the keys to a successful telework arrangement is to establish clear performance expectations and deliverables. The best way to manage an employee who isn't physically present is to evaluate performance based on results rather than activities or processes. From the outset, supervisors and teleworkers should agree upon clearly defined goals against which an employee's performance will be measured.

It's also important to establish and maintain regular avenues of communication among the supervisor, teleworker and co-workers. Out of sight shouldn't mean out of mind.

S18. How do I manage overtime with a telework employee?

The same provisions that apply to the official workplace apply to telework arrangements, including overtime. For more information about overtime provisions, refer to the collective agreement or talk to your human resource advisor.

S19. What happens if a telework employee is sick or needs to take other leave?

The same processes that apply to absences or taking leave from the official workplace apply to telework. Telework employees are required to notify their supervisor if they are unable to work due to illness and complete a sick leave form. The same applies to vacation and other leave requests. For more information on leave and benefit entitlements, refer to the collective agreement or Section M and talk to your human resource advisor.

S20. How can I or others in the work unit access the telework employee's files while they are on vacation or other leave?

Upon approving a telework employee's leave request, supervisors should make arrangements with the employee to access necessary files and documents, and to ensure all other operational requirements continue to be met.

S21. What happens if the telework arrangement isn't working out?

Telework is a voluntary work arrangement that can be ended by either party (employee or supervisor) subject to a pre-agreed notification period – usually two weeks. As with any issue affecting either job performance or satisfaction, it's a good idea to address issues as they occur, rather than waiting for them to develop into full fledged problems. Performance evaluations must continue to be done.

Regular communication is critical to ensuring the continued success of a telework arrangement. Situations do change however, and it's important to routinely evaluate the value of continuing the arrangement from both an operational and personal needs perspective.

S22. Occasionally an employee will ask to work from home for the day. Does this mean we need to sign a telework agreement?

Telework agreements aren't required for the occasional or ad hoc work-from-home request; however, if an employee's work arrangements will be altered on a longer-term or consistent basis (e.g. working from home every Friday or for several weeks at a stretch) then the Telework policy could apply. Talk to your human resource director about this.

S23. Can telework be used as a way to hire individuals who don't reside in the Yukon or the official workplace location?

The location of an employee's official workplace is not altered by a Telework Agreement and teleworkers may be required to return their official office at any time. If it's a matter of needing the engage outside services for a hard-to-find skill set, there may be more appropriate avenues. Talk to your human resource director.

For Employees

E1. What is telework?

Telework is a type of alternate work arrangement in which an employee works from another location (usually their home) for part or all of their work week. As with other alternate work options available to Yukon government employees, telework is both voluntary and subject to operational requirements.

E2. Does the Yukon government have a policy about telework?

Yes - the Telework Policy 3.12 and accompanying guidelines are part of the General Administration Manual, Volume 3. You can find these documents at: http://www.psc.gov.yk.ca/policy/gam_vol3.html

E3. How does it work?

Telework arrangements can vary depending on the needs of work units and of individual employees. Employees may telework for all or part of their work week. Depending on employee needs and operational requirements, an employee may telework for certain periods of the year and return to the regular workplace for the remainder. Employees within a work unit may rotate telework schedules and share a common work space in the office. Hours of work and all other terms and conditions of employment continue to apply.

E4. What equipment does the department provide? Employees?

For security reasons, the department must provide a Yukon government computer (PC or laptop) and a locking file cabinet. Unless otherwise specified in the telework agreement, departments generally pay for phone and internet costs and pre-approved office supplies. Telework employees are required to cover the costs of any additional home utilities and to carry, at their expense, a minimum of \$1million in general liability insurance.

Departments who are contemplating a telework agreement will have to take into account any additional costs as part of their criteria for determining the feasibility of a telework request.

E5. Do I qualify for telework?

Under the government's Telework Policy and Guidelines, all *Public Service Act* employees with a minimum of one year's service in their current position may be eligible to apply for a telework arrangement. To be considered, telework proposals must meet the criteria outlined in the guidelines with respect to the nature of the job, the suitability of the employee and the appropriateness of the teleworkplace.

E6. Is telework right for me?

Telework can be a way for some employees to achieve better work-life balance – but it's not for everyone.

In addition to demonstrating that your job is suited for telework, you must show that you meet the personal suitability criteria established in the guidelines. To telework, employees need to be experienced enough in their position to be able to work away from the office and have an established track record of consistently strong performance, reliability and time management.

Beyond these official requirements, employees considering telework should ask themselves the following:

- ? Will I miss the day-to-day interaction with my colleagues?
- ? Am I able to create an appropriate work space within my home? Do I have the necessary child care or other dependent-care arrangements in place to ensure a distraction free environment?
- ? Do I have the self-motivation and discipline it takes to get my work done from home?
- ? Am I willing to assume additional costs (e.g. to meet health and safety requirements, additional utilities, insurance requirements etc.)?

E7. Can a telework arrangement be used to assist me with dependent care responsibilities?

Telework may appeal to employees who seek better work-life balance; however working from home can't be used as a replacement for child care or other dependent care arrangements.

For example, parents may find telework helps them arrange their working hours to better coincide with the school day. Similarly, employees with elder care responsibilities may find a telework arrangement can reduce their daily commute, thereby freeing up valuable time in the day for family responsibilities.

Telework employees must continue to satisfy all their job requirements including hours of work and performance expectations, therefore if you wish to telework, you need to make alternate dependent care arrangements during your working hours.

E8. How do I apply for telework?

First read through the Telework Policy and Guidelines to make sure you understand the criteria and related components. Then set up a meeting with your supervisor to discuss your interest in teleworking.

It's a good idea to come prepared – develop a written proposal that clearly outlines how you, your job and your proposed teleworkplace meet the criteria. If your supervisor agrees to give telework a try, the two of you will then proceed to drafting a formal Telework Agreement. For more information on how to apply, consult **Telework Proposals: A step by step process overview** available from your HR advisor or the PSC website at <http://www.psc.gov.yk.ca/employeescurrent/telework.html>.

E9. Why was my telework proposal turned down?

To be approved, a telework proposal must satisfy the criteria outlined in the Yukon government's Telework Policy and Guidelines and receive the support of your department. Generally speaking, approval depends upon a combination of the right job, the right employee and the right teleworkplace. As public servants, our jobs exist to serve Yukon people. If telework impedes service delivery, then it's not a viable option.

Telework is not appropriate for every job or for every employee. If your request to telework is turned down, discuss the reasons with your supervisor. If it's an issue of personal suitability, find out if there are areas you can work on developing so that telework may be reconsidered at a future date.

E10. Can more than one employee in a unit telework?

Potentially, yes. Just as more than one employee in a work unit may be permitted to take advantage of flex-time, averaging hours, deferred salary leave, etc, it may be possible for more than one employee to telework. Supervisors have the final say based on operational requirements and personal suitability.

E11. I want to telework but my co-workers feel it's not fair to them. How can I address their concerns?

The decision about whether to approve a telework agreement ultimately rests with your supervisor. That being said, the telework criteria specify that co-workers concerns need to be addressed in an equitable manner. The best approach is to give your co-workers an opportunity to voice any concerns up front. For example, your co-workers may have concerns about the distribution of workload. They may need assurances that you will continue to handle your fair share of projects. Others may worry that they'll always be the ones called upon to handle urgent or ad-hoc tasks by virtue of being the ones "on the scene". Your co-workers may also have concerns about maintaining regular avenues of communication and information flow from a distance and the extra effort that it may take to do this.

Talking to others in the work unit allows you to put in place strategies to proactively address issues before they become a problem.

E12. I'm afraid that I'll miss out on training and advancement opportunities if I decide to telework.

Telework does not in any way alter an employee's status, benefits or entitlements; however, if you're considering telework, you need to carefully weigh the benefits against the potential disadvantages. Some people who work from home feel isolated and miss the social and professional interaction of the office. Others find it difficult to maintain regular communication and feel "out of the loop". Successful teleworkers are able to develop strategies to overcome these issues.

E13. What if the telework arrangement isn't working out?

Telework is a voluntary work arrangement that can be ended by either party (employee or supervisor) subject to a pre-agreed notification period – usually two weeks. As with any issue affecting either job performance or satisfaction, it's a good idea to address issues with your supervisor as they arise, rather than waiting for them to develop into full fledged problems.

Regular communication is critical to ensuring the continued success of a telework arrangement. Situations do change however, and it's important to routinely evaluate the value of continuing the arrangement from both a personal needs and an operational perspective.

E14. What happens if I'm sick on a telework day?

The same processes that apply to absences or taking leave from your official workplace apply to telework. Notify your supervisor if you are unable to work due to illness and complete a sick leave form. The same applies to vacation and other leave requests. For more information on leave and benefit entitlements, refer to the collective agreement or Section M as applicable and talk to your supervisor.

E15. Do I qualify for overtime during telework?

The same provisions that apply to your official workplace apply to telework, including overtime. For more information about overtime provisions, refer to the collective agreement and talk to your supervisor.

E16. Are there income tax considerations for teleworkers?

Depending on individual situations, employees may be eligible for some home office income tax deductions. Teleworkers are responsible for dealing directly with Revenue Canada to determine eligibility and reporting requirements.