

Teleworking (Telecommuting) during COVID-19

St. Mary's College's is committed to the wellbeing of all its employees and is actively working to develop systems and practices to effectively meet the public health challenge presented by COVID-19. For this reason, we are encouraging non-essential employees to work from home or another remote location when necessary in the coming weeks. Below you'll find guidance for supervisors, employees and departments to help set up temporary remote work arrangements quickly and successfully.

1. Telework is a work arrangement in which some or all of the work is performed from home or another off-site location. In general, regular office hours are worked and deviations from that schedule require supervisor approval.
2. **Which factors should departments/units consider when determining if telework is possible?**
 - Operational requirements
 - Security of work data
 - Technological capabilities and equipment necessary to perform job duties
 - Productivity
 - Accuracy of records reflecting time worked by non-exempt employees.
3. **Which jobs are suited for teleworking?**

Teleworking is easiest to implement for jobs or tasks that require reading, writing, research, working with data and talking on the phone. In general, and at management's discretion, a job is suited to teleworking if the job or some components of it can be done off-site without disruption to the flow of work and communication. The College has designated the positions that are telework eligible during this exceptional circumstance and these criteria are subject to change. Employees may reach out to their supervisor and the Office of Human Resources to inquire if their position is eligible.
4. **Which jobs are not as well suited for teleworking?**

It is not uncommon to require employees in positions needing in-person contact/customer service or that rely upon specific equipment or supplies to work on site. Management and/or supervisory roles also generally may be excluded from consideration for teleworking arrangements unless a department finds such an arrangement practical in meeting job responsibilities. **Some jobs that may not seem appropriate at first may be modified so that employees can telework.**
5. **What's most important to starting a productive teleworking arrangement?**

Clearly outlined and executed teleworking arrangements can prove beneficial to employees and managers alike. Managers should articulate clear procedures regarding check-in times and hours of availability. With proper planning, communications problems can be minimized.

Supervisor checklist for supporting teleworking

Telework works best when employees and supervisors communicate clearly about expectations. The following information may help you establish a foundation for effective teamwork, continued productivity, and service to the St. Mary's College community. The College's telework forms include a checklist that must be completed for telework requests.

1. Review technology needs and resources.

Identify technology tools staff use in their daily work and determine whether the resources will be accessible when working from home. Also, ensure employees know how to access the appropriate technical support should they need assistance.

- Confirm that employees know how to set up call forwarding and how to access their voicemail from home.
- Determine which platform(s) you will use to communicate as a team, clarify expectations for online availability and confirm everyone has access to the technology tool(s) and support resources. [here we might list any platforms that we would recommend – Google handouts, zoom, etc. for team based meetings.

2. Review work schedules.

Telework can be confused with flex work. Be clear about your expectations with employees for maintaining their current work schedule or if you are open to flexible scheduling based on employee needs and the needs of the College.

3. Draft a work plan.

The College's telework application requires a work plan. Review the questions below with the employee and work through answers together.

- What routine responsibilities/tasks cannot be fulfilled while working remotely and how will it impact College operations? What are ways to reduce the impacts?
- What routine responsibilities/tasks require regular communication and collaboration with others? Proactively contact each other to confirm how you will communicate while everyone is working remotely.
- Oftentimes employees experience fewer interruptions while teleworking. Are there any special projects or tasks that you can advance while working remotely?
- What events or meetings are scheduled during the time in which the temporary telework arrangement is in place? Will they be postponed or canceled, or will they take place using technology? What follow-up needs to occur due to postponements or cancellations?

4. Make a communication and accountability plan.

Supervisors should tell employees how often they should send updates on work plan progress and what those updates should include. Supervisors should also communicate how quickly they expect the employee to respond while teleworking and the best ways for the employee to contact the supervisor while working remotely. Current performance standards are expected to be maintained by employees.

- If you normally make daily rounds to visit employees at their desks, you can give them a call during this period. Maintain team meetings and one-to-one check-ins, altering the schedule if needed to accommodate any alternative schedules that have been approved.
- Conduct regular check-ins. Start each workday with a phone, video or instant message chat. Your employees will be eager for connection and information during the disruption and the

structure will help everyone create a positive routine. Every other day or weekly may be fine, so long as you are in contact frequently enough that your employees are in sync with you and/or with one another.

5. Focus on outcomes, not hours

Teleworking presents an opportunity for managers to become better supervisors. Instead of focusing on how many hours your employees are working, re-emphasize a focus on measuring results and reaching objectives—regardless of work arrangement. The employee’s completed work product is the indicator of success, rather than direct observation.

6. Debrief after normal operations resume.

Employees and supervisors should review work plans when work returns to normal, assess progress on the employee’s work plan and prioritize any unresolved or new work that resulted from temporary operational disruption.

Teleworking tips for employees

Employees who telework often learn that working remotely is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following tips will help you get to work while at home.

1. Define your workspace.

Experienced teleworkers will tell you that its often difficult to stay focused at home. We are creatures of habit and most of us are used to our normal home routines. Establishing a workspace, even if it is your kitchen table, gives your brain a cue that it is time for work. Wearing attire that you may wear to the office even if it is your “casual Friday” attire may cue the brain. You should remain capable of reporting to campus if your presence is requested by your supervisor.

2. Set daily goals, track them and share your progress.

You may be surprised by how differently the workday passes without the comings and goings of an office to break things up or influence what you do next. Start each day of telework by writing down what you need to achieve and then track your progress. Pay attention to how long tasks take you and start adjusting your daily goals to match your current rhythm. Communicate with your supervisor and/or colleagues if you think your telework plan needs to be adjusted.

3. Eliminate distractions.

Home can mean pets, children or a favorite hobby are only a few feet away. Depending on your living arrangement, you may need to hang a “do not disturb” sign so your family members don’t interrupt you. Pets often need a closed door to keep them away and you might need headphones to block the noise.

4. Prioritize privacy.

Whether you are in your home or a common area, take five minutes to assess the privacy of your workspace. Can someone standing behind you read your computer screen? Are your windows open so your neighbor can hear your phone call? What information do you need to secure before grabbing a cup of coffee or heading to the restroom? Your personal privacy matters too, so see if there is anything around you that you would not want visible during a video conference with your boss or colleague.

5. **Continue to employ security best practices.**

Situations like this are prime phishing opportunities. Remain vigilant for security concerns and be sure to report suspicious emails to the [Office of Information Technology](#).

- VPNs can also allow you to safely connect to a remote network of computers as if you are there. If you are dealing with sensitive information and want to explore VPN, you can learn more at [link]
- You are expected to follow the expectations outlined in the College's Institutional Data Policy.
- If you have a security incident, submit a [ticket](#) to the Office of Information Technology.

Tips for departments with widespread telework

With many teams moving to telework quickly, departments may want to adapt the following suggestions:

1. **Engage your team.**

Setting up a group to work remotely is different than setting up an individual employee to telework. Effective remote teamwork requires entire units to embrace technology and proactive communication in ways that may be new and challenging to traditional ways of working.

Support the success of your team by:

- Scheduling a conversation about what it may look like for your team to work remotely.
- Identify needs and tool preferences of team members for remote work.
- Document and share telework practices/plans.
- Schedule regular team meetings via video conferencing.

2. **Enable and encourage ongoing communication.**

Ongoing communication is the most important part of effective remote teamwork. Working online can be isolating without regular contact with supervisors and colleagues. By creating the expectation that an entire team will communicate regularly with one another, members will feel connected regardless of where they are.